

Palestinian Performing Arts Network Statement on the destruction of the Said al-Mishal Cultural Center in Gaza

We in the Palestinian Performing Arts Network are outraged and fully condemn the deliberate destruction of the Said al-Mishal Cultural Centre in Gaza City. Being one of the very few cultural spaces left for Palestinians in Gaza, this destruction is devastating. The five-floor building held a theatre, a library, offices for cultural associations, was the headquarters of the al-Anqaa' (the Phoenix) dance troupe, and provided open spaces for performances and trainings for cultural organizations in the Gaza Strip. Various members of the network, including, the Popular Art Centre and Ashtar Theatre are partners with al-Mishal Centre and use its art space to conduct trainings and implement performances and festivals with their partners in Gaza. Al-Mishal Center and its venues represented an important symbol of Palestinian cultural identity and freedom of expression in the Gaza Strip. The Center was a symbol of Palestinian cultural heritage and was purposefully targeted by the Israeli occupation because art and culture reinforce and strengthen Palestinian national and cultural identity.

This decision to destroy Palestinian cultural sites in Gaza only has one meaning; it is a psychological warfare on Palestinian social, national and cultural connection to the land. The attempt to silence the voices for freedom and right to self

determination is not a new phenomenon by the Israeli occupation. On July 14, 2018, less than a month ago, the Village of Arts and Crafts, west of Gaza City, was destroyed by Israeli occupation bombing. The village, which contains many paintings and handicrafts that reflect the authenticity of the Palestinian people and their heritage, has been destroyed.

We in the Palestinian Performing Arts Network consider the destruction of Palestinian tangible and intangible cultural heritage by the Israeli occupation as a pre-determined and systematic policy of negating Palestinian right to their land, their cultural heritage and discrediting their historical claims.

We call upon the international community, fellow artists and cultural workers and organizations to:

- Continue your solidarity, advocacy and lobbying with regards to the injustice that Palestinian people have witnessed;
- Pressure your governments to lift the siege on Gaza and developing a system of accountability for the damage caused by the Israeli occupation bombings and destruction;
- The international community needs to oblige Israel to abide by the Fourth Geneva Convention and international law and protect Palestinian tangible and intangible cultural heritage;

- Palestinian private and public sector institutions, namely the Ministry of Culture, should adopt the rebuilding program of all destroyed cultural and artistic venues and organizations;
- We implore UNESCO to issue a statement and resolution condemning the destruction of Palestinian tangible cultural heritage, and demand the international community rebuild the Center and other cultural and artistic organizations destroyed by the Israeli occupation in Gaza Strip;

Palestinian Performing Arts Network

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