The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA)

More than 100 media freedom violations in the first six months of 2012

Ramallah – While new figures show a slight decrease in the number of attacks against journalists and media organizations in the year to-date, the status of media freedoms in the occupied Palestinian territories remains under serious threat, the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) said today.

MADA General Director Mousa Rimawi said that in the first half of 2012 the Center monitored 102 violations against journalists and media institutions. Sixty per cent of these violations were carried out by Israeli forces, and the remainder were committed by various Palestinian parties in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The high overall number of violations is the result of of Israel's continued occupation of the Palestinian territories, and on-going internal divisions within   Palestine.

These latest results are a small improvement on the 113 violations recorded by MADA in the same period in 2011, but the nature of the violations has changed. For example, in 2011 the violations by Palestinian perpetrators outnumbered those by Israeli forces, although MADA found the Israeli violations posed a greater physical risk to journalists.

According to Mousa Rimawi: "The number of violations committed against journalists and media institutions in Palestine remains high overall, which indicates the on-going deterioration in media freedoms and the oppressive working atmosphere for journalists. This encourages self-censorship among journalists, who wish to avoid being subjected to violations, including being detained. Sadly Palestine's ranking will fell in Press   Freedom   Index   by   Reporters   Without   Borders.

"We are concerned about the continuing Israeli attacks on journalists who are simply doing their jobs, and the on-going detention of a number of journalists. Israel continues to defy the international community through its disregard for international conventions that guarantee freedom of

expression. The international community must immediately intervene."

Mr. Rimawi said MADA Center, journalists and civil society orgnizations worked this year to take action against a number of media violations, including the prosecution of some journalists and bloggers, and the closure of a number of websites by Palestinian parties with the assistance of civil society organisations, this policy was temporarily stopped through the issuance of a Presidential decision to reopen blocked websites.

However, widespread attacks against journalists in June and early July re-ignited tensions and required another serious push by all institutions and individuals who defend freedom of expression in Palestine.

Mr Rimawi expressed his appreciation for Palestinian journalists who, despite the risks and difficulties, continue to perform their work and report on the facts for the Palestinian community and others around the globe.

Violations by Israeli occupation forces:

MADA recorded 61 violations committed by Israeli occupation forces against journalists and Palestinian media institutions during the first six months of the 2012. This was an increase of 17 violations on the same period last year. Israeli forces have jeopardized the lives of journalists who were targeted directly with rubber bullets and tear gas, particularly in February, when MADA recorded 19 violations for that month alone. Most journalists were covering various public events related to the hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners in protest against poor conditions in Israeli jails.

Israeli violations against journalists over the same six month period in recent years:

Year	Number of violations
2008	87
2009	54
2010	79

2011	45
2012	61

Physical attack: the most common violation by Israeli forces

As with previous years, physical attacks against journalists accounted for around half the Israeli forces violations recorded by MADA. Most of the 31 physical attacks recorded were committed against journalists who were covering the weekly marches and public events relating to the hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners in the West Bank.

In the same period, an additional eight journalists were injured with Israeli bullets. The most serious injury was sustained by *Alhayat Aljadedeh* newspaper photographer Muheb Barghouti, who was shot in both legs while covering a weekly march in Bil'in on 27 January 2012.

MADA was also told that Israeli forces opened fire on six journalists in the Gaza Strip on 1 May 2012, while they were reporting on bulldozed land belonging to farmers in the Farrahin area, east of Khan Younis. The journalists sought refuge in a neighboring house.

In addition, four journalists remain in administrative detention. They are: correspondent with *Palestine News Network* and Emirates newspaper *AlKhaleej*, Amin Abu Warda; director of *Alresaleh* newspaper West Bank office Walid Khalid; *Shehab* news agency correspondent Amer Abu Arafa; and *Aqsa Radio* correspondent Sharif Rajoub.

Israeli forces continue to arrest journalists and to extend the detention of those already arrested without charge, which is illegal and breaches international conventions. Since the beginning of the year, MADA has recorded a total of 12 arrests and administrative arrest extensions against journalists, by Israeli forces.

Violations by Israeli forces against Palestinian media outlets:

Israeli attacks are not limited to the targeting of journalists as they perform their professional duties. MADA has also received reports of attempts to paralyse the work of media institutions through raids and the confiscation or destruction of their equipment, which affects journalists' work and causes substantial financial losses. MADA figures show that Israeli forces have stepped up these practices against Palestinian media

organisations, with four institutions raided and equipment confiscated from them. In response, MADA Center issued a special report on the targeting of Palestinian media organisations by Israeli forces since 2008.

The most prominent Israeli attacks against media outlets in the first half of 2012 were the February raids on Watan TV, inluding the confiscation of equipment and archives dating back ten years, and on the headquarters of Quds Educational TV, including the confiscation of broadcasting equipment and tampering with their contents which prevented television broadcast.

On April 2, 2012, Israeli forces raided the Jerusalem office of media network *Hona Al-Quds* (*Jerusalem is Here*). On May 17, *Al-Aseer* channel's main transmission device in Jenin was confiscated. The channel was forced to use its back-up transmitter to continue broadcasting, but Israeli forces control these broadcasts and will only publish material they choose via satellite.

Media freedoms violations by Israeli forces in the first half of 2012 – by category

Category	Number
Attacks	31
Arrest	12
Detention	5
Equipment confiscated	4
Raid	4
Preventing media coverage	2
Closure	1
Preventing travel of media staff	1
Bomb attack	1

Recommendations:

MADA once again calls on the international community to place serious and effective pressure on the Israeli Government to stop all practices against journalists and Palestinian media institutions that contravene international conventions and laws, such as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the decision of the General Assembly of the United Nations 59 d - 1 from 1946, as well as UNESCO resolutions and other decisions. In particular, MADA calls for:

1. An end to the physical abuse of journalists who put their lives at risk, especially while covering the weekly peaceful marches in the West Bank. In the past decade, Israeli forces have killed 20 journalists
2. The immediate release of four journalists being held without charge in Israeli prisons.

3. The return of all equipment confiscated from Palestinian media organisations so far this year, most of which were financed by internatinal donors. For example, the $300,000 worth of equipment confiscated from Watan TV was funded by the U.S. Agency for Development (USAID).

Violations by Palestinian authorities:

Despite the fall in the number of violations committed by Palestinian authorities in the first half of 2012, compared to the same period last year (from 68 to 41 violations), the overall number of Palestinian violations remains high.

These violations by Palestinian authorities, including the prosecution and monitoring of journalists, indicates the low ceiling of freedom afforded to journalists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These violations followed a rise in self-censorship due to the internal Fatah-Hamas split and the near absence of investigative journalism, which led to setback of the the Palestinian media professional level.

Palestinian violations against journalists over the same six month period in recent years:

Year	Number of violations
2008	35

2009	33
2010	19
2011	68
2012	41

The month of March:

The highest number of Palestinian violations against media freedoms came in March. MADA monitored 14 violations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in March 2012, which is more than one-third of the total Palestinian violations during the first half of the current year.

In the Gaza Strip in March, journalists were subjected to dangerous violations by security services, including at least nine cases of detention, beating and summons for investigation. In the West Bank in March, MADA recorded five serious violations committed by Palestinian authorities, involving the arrest and trial of journalists.

Press freedom and the Internet

With the continuing growth of e-news sites and increased activity by journalists on social networking sites, especially Facebook, MADA noted an increase in the number of violations relating to electronic media.

In recent years, Palestine has enjoyed a relatively free Internet environment without censorship or restrictions on media freedoms. However, MADA monitored seven violations relating to the internet in the first half of this year. A number of these were serious violations, such as the prosecution of journalists for allegedly posting critical comments on Facebook, the blocking of eight news websites, and the arrest and interrogation of a journalist for publishing a critical article on the Internet.

Investigation and detention:

The detention and investigation of journalists accounted for the bulk of Palestinian violations against journalists, with nine violations recorded by MADA in each category. In addition, eight journalists were prevented from covering events.

This is a significant increase in the number of arrests of journalists during the first half of this year, compared to last year when MADA monitored just five arrests in 12 months. Detention is one of the most serious violations against journalists, designed to intimidate them and impede their   work.

The nine investigations recorded by MADA represent a significant drop in the first six months of this year, compared with the 16 investigations recorded in the same period last year.

Category	Number
Investigation	9
Arrest	9
Detention	6
Prevent from covering events	8
Raid	1
Attack	3
Closure and blocking (?? Closure of what? Offices?)	1
Trial	2
Threats	1

Recommendations:

MADA demands that relevant authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip respect freedom of opinion and expression, especially since these principles are explicitly guaranteed in Article 19 of the Palestinian Basic Law. MADA calls for:

1 – An adherence to the Palestinian Basic Law and the protection of freedom of opinion and expression in any form.

2 – An end to the detention of journalists and an end to efforts to prevent them from reporting, regardless of the media outlet.

3 - The redistribution of banned newspapers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip immediately and without complication.

4 – The abolition of censorship on the Internet, including on social networking sites.

5 – An end to the investigation of journalists who are simply doing their job or expressing their opinion.

6 - The implementation of recommendations of the independent committee established to investigate events which took place in Ramallah on 30 June and 1 July 2012, which was established following a decision by President Mahmoud Abbas.