

His Excellency Khaled El-Enany
Director-General
UNESCO
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8 July 2026

Your Excellency,

I write to transmit the attached UN Watch [report](#), "**UNESCO's Misidentification of Terrorist Operatives as Journalists in Gaza**," which documents repeated instances in which UNESCO publicly identified acknowledged Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist operatives as journalists killed in Gaza and condemned their deaths as attacks on the press. The report, which we are releasing today, demonstrates that in multiple cases Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad themselves subsequently acknowledged that the individuals concerned were members or operatives of their organizations. Yet UNESCO has neither corrected nor withdrawn the statements in question.

These repeated misrepresentations are incompatible with UNESCO's mandate, its published verification methodology, and the standards of integrity, independence, and impartiality governing the Organization's work. They also risk lending the authority of the United Nations to a well-documented tactic by terrorist organizations of concealing military operatives behind civilian identities.

This pattern is fundamentally inconsistent with UNESCO's mandate and its own published methodology for verifying the deaths of journalists. UNESCO's [Constitution](#) entrusts the Organization with promoting "the free flow of ideas by word and image." That [mission](#) necessarily depends upon the credibility of UNESCO's public communications. UNESCO's own [methodology](#) for its *Observatory of Killed Journalists* provides that reported cases are verified using multiple sources and may be updated when new evidence emerges. Likewise, both the [Standards of Conduct for International Civil Service](#) and the [UNESCO Staff Rules and Regulations](#) require UNESCO officials and employees to act with integrity, independence, and impartiality. Those standards cannot be reconciled with publicly identifying members of terrorist organizations as journalists or failing to correct the record once their affiliations become known.

Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad have long embedded members of their military wings within civilian institutions while concealing their operational roles. The use of civilian status to shield military activity violates the principle of distinction under international humanitarian law and places genuine civilians, including journalists, at greater risk. By identifying acknowledged Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad operatives as journalists, UNESCO has implicitly legitimized that violation.

We therefore respectfully call upon UNESCO to:

1. Publicly condemn the practice of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad employing members of their military apparatus in media roles and presenting terrorist operatives as uninvolved journalists.
2. Review every UNESCO statement and Observatory entry concerning journalists killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023, in light of credible evidence of membership or operational role with Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and correct or retract any statement or entry that inaccurately identified terrorist operatives as journalists and omitted their acknowledged terrorist affiliations.
3. Commission an independent investigation of UNESCO's verification procedures for journalist casualty statements issued since October 7, 2023, to determine whether UNESCO staff failed to comply with the Organization's verification methodology and applicable rules of conduct, identify those responsible, and impose appropriate disciplinary measures, including dismissal where warranted.
4. Announce all UNESCO employees responsible for the agency listing terrorists as journalists, and disclose which were terminated or otherwise disciplined.
5. Adopt a formal policy requiring UNESCO, before identifying any deceased individual as a journalist or condemning his or her killing on that basis, to determine whether the individual was a member of, or performing operational functions for, an armed group or designated terrorist organization, and to promptly retract any statement when credible contrary evidence emerges.
6. Publish the evidence, sources, and verification methodology relied upon for every UNESCO statement and Observatory entry concerning journalists killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023, including any contradictory information that was considered and the reasons for UNESCO's final determination.
7. Submit the findings of the independent investigation, together with proposed corrective measures, to the UNESCO Executive Board and Member States, and publicly report on the implementation of those reforms within six months, including measures taken to ensure that UNESCO's journalist casualty reporting fully complies with its verification standards, Staff Rules, and the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service.

We urge UNESCO to take the action set out in this letter and look forward to your response outlining the steps the Organization intends to take.

Sincerely,



Hillel C. Neuer
Executive Director