

Giornalismo sotto accusa: incarcerata per aver denunciato la Giordania

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La giornalista freelance Hiba Abu Taha è stata incarcerata per un anno ai sensi della draconiana legge sui crimini informatici della Giordania per aver denunciato il commercio segreto del governo con Israele, segnando l'ennesimo esempio della dura repressione del regno sulle voci dissenzienti.

Il corrispondente dalla Giordania del Cradle

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In Giordania, fallire nell'autocensura può farti finire in prigione. Letteralmente.

La giornalista freelance Hiba Abu Taha, un'appassionata giordana di origine palestinese pro-resistenza, ha rifiutato di autocensurarsi. L'11 giugno, il tribunale di Amman l'ha condannata a una dura pena detentiva di un anno per aver violato la controversa legge sui crimini informatici del regno introdotta lo scorso anno.

Ciò era dovuto a un articolo che ha scritto per il sito di notizie libanese, *Annasher*, in cui criticava "il ruolo della Giordania nella difesa dell'entità nemica". L'articolo è stato pubblicato il 22 aprile, otto giorni dopo che aerei giordani, statunitensi, britannici e francesi avevano intercettato droni e razzi iraniani sullo spazio aereo giordano diretti verso obiettivi israeliani.

Tuttavia, Abu Taha è stata arrestata il 13 maggio dopo che *Annasher* aveva pubblicato il suo rapporto investigativo il 28 aprile intitolato “ Partner nello sterminio: proprietari di capitali giordani coinvolti nel genocidio di Gaza ”. Il momento del suo arresto ha dato l'impressione che fosse stata detenuta per aver smascherato le aziende giordane che trasportavano esportazioni verso Israele – un corridoio terrestre che i funzionari governativi hanno fatto di tutto per negare pubblicamente in mezzo alla crescente indignazione popolare per i continui legami di Amman con Tel Aviv mentre commette il Genocidio di Gaza.

È opinione diffusa che il suo rapporto investigativo di quasi 2.000 parole, supportato da un video di 15 minuti di prove raccolte sotto copertura, sia stato il vero motivo dell'incriminazione della giornalista.

Smascherare gli inganni del governo sulle rotte commerciali israeliane

Nel suo rapporto, Abu Taha ha accusato il primo ministro Bisher Khasawneh e altri funzionari di nascondere l'uso della Giordania come via terrestre per le esportazioni degli Emirati Arabi Uniti e del Bahrein attraverso l'Arabia Saudita verso Israele per rompere il blocco yemenita di Ansarallah nel Mar Rosso e nel Mar Arabico.

Cita i dipendenti delle società di trasporto e sdoganamento ad Amman e Aqaba riguardo ai loro servizi di trasporto di merci attraverso il ponte settentrionale Sheikh Hussein o l'attraversamento meridionale del Wadi Araba. Ha continuato esponendo i nomi delle aziende giordane e dei loro influenti proprietari, che non hanno mostrato remore nel fare affari come al solito con lo stato occupante poiché commette crimini di guerra senza precedenti sia a Gaza che in Cisgiordania.

Abu Taha also identifies influential company owners acting as agents for Israeli or Israel-bound shipping companies. Resorting to official documents, she writes that Jordanian exports to Israel increased from \$123 million in 2022 to \$143 million in 2023, with a record monthly high of \$17 million in December 2023, a month after Yemen began targeting Israeli-owned and Israel-bound cargo ships.

She notes that despite court evidence “recognizing the existence of the land bridge” as well as video footage and pictures of the movement of trucks at the Sheikh Hussein border crossing, Khasawneh insisted that:

The land bridge is a figment of imagination with no truth on the ground ... The number of trucks entering and leaving Jordan for the entity has decreased, and what is being raised is nothing but self-flagellation.

Abu Taha details her exchange with government spokesman Muhannad Mubaidin, who fires back at “those accusing Jordan” of providing a land bridge for Israel as “shameful.”

She writes that he “initially tried to deny the government’s role” in this regard and “even tried to point the finger at West Bank merchants as deceiving their colleagues in Jordan by telling them that the exports are for the Arabs.”

When confronted with the facts she found, Mubaidin immediately referred to the 1994 Wadi Araba peace treaty with Israel and stressed that the government would not ban trade with the Zionist state because “such a decision is a populist one that appeases a certain party or faction.”

Meanwhile, Trade Ministry Spokesman Yanal Barmawi told Abu Taha that he was unaware of the “export issue” and that “the private sector would know.” She writes that official denials and blaming the private sector, which cannot operate without government approval, “confirms that the authorities are trying to contain the Jordanian street.”

Opinion prosecution

Despite the rigor of her investigative report, Abu Taha was prosecuted for her 22 April opinion piece. Nidal Mansour, co-founder of the Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ), noted that Abu Taha was convicted under the restrictive Cybercrimes Law, which was enacted shortly before 7 October 2023.

The Media Commission, a government-controlled regulatory body, filed a complaint against her, accusing her of “inciting sedition and discord among members of the community,” “threatening community peace,” “inciting violence,” and “spreading false news” through electronic media.

Abu Taha’s article accused Jordan of “treason,” among other derogatory terms, for intercepting Iran’s retaliatory strikes against Israel and giving the US, British, and French military forces a free hand in the country to defend the occupation state.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) quotes Media Commissioner Bashir al-Momani as saying that Abu Taha’s article contained “serious insults against Jordanian state institutions, incitement to the state’s positions, and stirring up discord among the components of the people,” which he added “necessitated her prosecution.”

According to a CDFJ statement, Abu Taha was convicted under Articles 15 and 17 of the 40-article Cybercrime Law of August 2023. Article 15 stipulates:

Whoever intentionally sends, resends, or publishes data or information through an information network, information technology, information system, website, or social media platforms that includes fake news targeting the national security and community peace, or defames, slanders, or contempt [*sic*] any person shall be imprisoned for a period of not less than three months or a fine of not less than 5,000 dinars and no more than 20,000 dinars, or both penalties.

Article 15 also gives the prosecutor the right to take legal action “without the need to file a complaint or claim a personal right if it is directed at one of the authorities in the state, official bodies, or public administrations,” which means that Abu Taha could have still been punished even if the Media Commission had not filed a complaint.

The court also invoked Article 17 to hand her a one-year sentence. It states that:

Whoever intentionally uses an information network, information technology, information system, website, or social media platform to spread what is likely to stir up racism or sedition, targets social peace, incites hatred, calls for or justifies violence, or insults religions, shall be punished by imprisonment from one to three years or a fine of no less than 5,000 dinars and no more than 20,000 dinars, or both penalties.

Draconian laws and legal challenges

Abu Taha’s opinion piece in *Annasher* undoubtedly lacked the self-censorship that Amman has successfully induced by imposing a series of restrictive press and media laws over the decades.

Mansour tells *The Cradle* that the press and publication laws have become more draconian with the evolution of information technology, beginning with restrictive laws on the independent weekly press back in the 1990s, to online news sites in the early 2000s, and social media with the most recent “fluid” Cybercrime Law that could effectively stifle any form of free speech on these platforms.

He notes that Abu Taha’s lawyer, Rami Odatallah, appointed by the leftist Jordanian Popular Unity Party (an offshoot of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine), is more experienced in defending political activists than journalists.

Abu Taha is not a member of the political party. Still, it stood by her ordeal and denounced her arrest and sentencing, demanding her release and other activists that had been “harassed and arrested” for supporting the resistance against Israel online or on the street.

Mansour reveals that the CDFJ plans to hire a lawyer specialized in the Cybercrime Law to appeal her sentence, which his organization described as “deeply concerning” and called for “abolishing imprisonment in cases related to publication and freedom of expression in accordance with international human rights standards.”

Press freedom concerns

Abu Taha’s arrest and sentencing drew attention to Jordan’s crackdown on both journalists and rightfully enraged activists by using the Cybercrime Law.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in a statement that Abu Taha was: “the first journalist in Jordan to receive a prison sentence under the country’s draconian Cybercrime Law, which the RSF denounced prior to its adoption last year.”

Jonathan Dagher, head of RSF’s Middle East desk, said:

A prison sentence for a journalist is a scandal in Jordan, one of the few countries in the region not to have reporters behind bars. This sentence constitutes a huge setback for press freedoms in the kingdom and threatens not only Hiba Abu Taha’s safety but also the safety of all reporters. RSF already sounded the alarm about the dangers posed by the new cybercrime law. It must be repealed at once, and Hiba Abu Taha’s conviction must be overturned.

The RSF warned that “Jordan has seen a surge in harassment of journalists, including arrests, censorship, and intimidation since December 2023. Those targeted have included journalists covering demonstrations in support of Gaza or revealing information concerning relations between Jordan and Israel, and the harassment has been carried out under the Cybercrime Law in particular.”

Defense lawyer’s perspective

Defense Lawyer Hala Ahed says that no figures were available on the number of activists arrested under this law since the Israeli aggression on Gaza in October, but her office alone is dealing with 20 clients that she is defending pro bono.

She tells *The Cradle* that even if the authorities or courts release the defendants on bail after their detention, which often lasts up to a week behind bars, the mere existence of the Cybercrime Law acts as a deterrent and a legal intimidation tool aimed at stifling free speech and the right to protest.

Journalists say that the authorities seek to “make an example” of Abu Taha because the court turned down her lawyer’s repeated request for her release on bail since her arrest and was quick to hand her a one-year prison sentence within one month.

Le autorità, aggiungono, vogliono inviare un messaggio chiaro: chiunque, giornalista o meno, oserà sfidare pubblicamente la spudorata linea ufficiale alleata degli Stati Uniti che si oppone alla resistenza alleata dell'Iran finirà in prigione, sia attraverso la legge sulla criminalità informatica o qualsiasi altra altro.

Precedente arresto e sfida

Abu Taha non è estraneo alla persecuzione. È stata arrestata dopo essere stata condannata a tre mesi di carcere l'8 agosto dello scorso anno, pochi giorni prima dell'entrata in vigore della legge sulla criminalità informatica e mesi prima del lancio dell'operazione Al-Aqsa Flood.

È stata accusata di “diffamazione di un ente ufficiale” per un post su Facebook in cui accusava il re Abdallah II di normalizzazione con Israele e includeva un’immagine modificata del monarca con una bandiera israeliana durante le invasioni dei coloni israeliani alla moschea di Al-Aqsa – che dovrebbe essere sotto la tutela hashemita giordana come tutti i luoghi santi musulmani e cristiani a Gerusalemme. Abu Taha è stato rilasciato un paio di giorni dopo aver fatto appello contro la sentenza.

L’11 agosto 2023, ha pubblicato una foto di se stessa sorridente con gli occhi chiusi sulla sua pagina Facebook, scrivendo che stava “sognando una realtà priva di normalizzazione con il nemico e senza tradimento da parte del più piccolo fino al più alto funzionario statale”.

Ha detto che poiché la corte “ha considerato la normalizzazione con l’entità sionista un’accusa, chiedo il perseguimento di tutti i normalizzatori che guidano il Primo Ministro e governano il paese invece di perseguire me per aver rifiutato e criticato la normalizzazione con il nemico storico della nazione!”

Il giornalista ha aggiunto nello stesso post che “le restrizioni e le celle di prigione non ci intimidiscono” e “continueremo a criticare e condannare la normalizzazione senza eccezioni”.

Ha concluso il suo messaggio con: “Basta con l’oppressione e la brutalità con la spada della legge marziale e liberate i detenuti”.

Le opinioni espresse in questo articolo non riflettono necessariamente quelle di The Cradle.