

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises; the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967

Ref.: AL OTH 151/2025

(Please use this reference in your reply)

8 December 2025

Mr. Pichai,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism; Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises; Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 58/14, 53/3, 54/14, 52/9, 59/4, 52/4 and 1993/2A.

We are independent human rights experts appointed and mandated by the United Nations Human Rights Council to report and advise on human rights issues from a thematic or country-specific perspective. We are part of the special procedures system of the United Nations, which has 59 thematic and country mandates on a broad range of human rights issues. We are sending this letter under the communications procedure of the Special Procedures of the United Nations Human Rights Council to seek clarification on information we have received. Special Procedures mechanisms can intervene directly with Governments and other stakeholders (including companies) on allegations of abuses of human rights that come within their mandates by means of letters, which include urgent appeals, allegation letters, and other communications. The intervention may relate to a human rights violation that has already occurred, is ongoing, or which has a high risk of occurring. The process involves sending a letter to the concerned actors identifying the facts of the allegation, applicable international human rights norms and standards, the concerns and questions of the mandate-holder(s), and a request for follow-up action. Communications may deal with individual cases, general patterns and trends of human rights violations, cases affecting a particular group or community, or the content of draft or existing legislation, policy or practice considered not to be fully compatible with international human rights standards.

In this context, we would like to bring to your attention information received regarding the **disruption of digital operations of two Palestinian organisations - Al-Haq: Law in the Service of Man and the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights**, following their designation and subsequent imposition of sanctions by the United States

Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). It is alleged that Google's YouTube deactivated the organisations' accounts without warning, Intuit's Mailchimp abruptly deactivated Al-Haq's account, and Meta restricted their use of its advertising tools, severely limiting their ability to communicate, advocate, and mobilize globally.

According to the information received:

On 4 September 2025, OFAC imposed sanctions on Al-Haq and Al-Mezan by adding them to the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list pursuant to section 1(a)(ii)(A) of U.S. Presidential Executive Order 14203 of 6 February 2025, "Imposing Sanctions on the International Criminal Court".¹ On the same day, OFAC issued the General License 10 under the International Criminal Court-Related Sanctions Regulations (31 CFR part 528), authorizing U.S. persons to wind down transactions with Al-Haq and Al-Mezan until 12:01 a.m. EDT on 4 October 2025. This temporary license permits only those activities that are ordinarily incidental and necessary to conclude existing engagements, provided that any payments to the designated entities are made into blocked interest-bearing accounts located in the United States. The license does not authorize any new transactions or dealings with other blocked persons under the ICC-related sanctions regime.

According to the public statement delivered the same day by U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, the organisations were designated on the basis of their alleged direct engagement in efforts by the ICC "to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute Israeli nationals, without Israel's consent".² Secretary Rubio further stated that the U.S. "opposes the ICC's politicized agenda, overreach, and disregard for the sovereignty of the United States and that of our allies", and affirmed that the Government would "respond with significant and tangible consequences ... to punish entities that are complicit in its overreach".³

Executive order 14203 asserts that any attempt by the ICC to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute certain "protected persons" without the consent of their respective countries constitutes an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to U.S. national security and foreign policy. It declares a national emergency to address that threat. Its preamble further characterises the ICC as having engaged in "illegitimate and baseless actions" against U.S. and Israeli personnel and recalls the American Service-Members' Protection Act of 2002 as the statutory basis for resisting ICC jurisdiction over U.S. nationals and allies.

¹ According to Section 1(a)(ii)(A) of Executive Order 14203: "[a]ll property and interests in property that are in the United States, that hereafter come within the United States, or that are or hereafter come within the possession or control of any United States person, of the following persons are blocked and may not be transferred, paid, exported, withdrawn, or otherwise dealt in [...] any foreign person determined by the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Attorney General [...] to have directly engaged in any effort by the ICC to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute a protected person without consent of that person's country of nationality".

² U.S. Department of State, *Sanctioning Foreign NGOs Directly Engaged in ICC's Illegitimate Targeting of Israel: Press Statement Marco Rubio, Secretary of State*, 4 September 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/09/sanctioning-foreign-ngos-directly-engaged-in-iccs-illegitimate-targeting-of-israel>.

³ Ibid.

Al-Haq, established in 1979, is an independent Palestinian human rights organisation based in Ramallah. It conducts documentation, research, and legal advocacy on violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, founded in 1999 and based in the Gaza Strip, focuses on the promotion and protection of human rights, accountability for violations, and the situation of vulnerable groups including children and women, producing detailed reports documenting abuses and human rights violations. It also provides legal aid and representation to victims of violations.

Collectively, these organisations form the backbone of Palestinian civil society's engagement with international accountability mechanisms. They have been instrumental in documenting systemic human rights abuses and violations in OPT and Israel, advocating for justice, submitting evidence to the ICC, and bringing alleged breaches of international law before global judicial forums.

The sanctions have had a significant and detrimental impact on the digital operations of Al-Haq and the Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, as well as on their broader human rights advocacy efforts. **Google's YouTube** has deactivated the accounts of these organisations, resulting in the permanent loss of critical videos, documentaries, and testimonies collected from victims of international crimes in Palestine. This action has severely undermined the organisations' capacity to ensure that the voices of Palestinian victims are heard, that the violations they endured are documented and remedied, and that accurate records of these violations are preserved and publicly accessible. The deactivation has effectively obstructed the organisations' efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and to uphold the rights of victims under international human rights standard.

A joint statement issued on 22 September 2025 by several UN Special Procedures mandate holders expressed dismay at the imposition of sanctions against these “globally respected” organisations, stressing that the new sanctions on “these key Palestinian organisations pursuant to executive order 14203 come at a time when many countries have begun to voice strong condemnation of Israeli attacks and killings of civilians in Gaza, the targeting of journalists and medical personnel, and restrictions on food aid resulting in famine being declared in the besieged enclave. Sanctioning organisations for denouncing human rights violations is a blatant violation of the rights to freedom of expression and association”.⁴

As of the date of writing, Al-Haq and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights have not filed an appeal against the OFAC designation, as the organisations have not received the necessary and sufficiently clear information from OFAC to understand the evidentiary basis of the designation and to effectively challenge the decisions. Moreover, the procedures for such appeals are not transparent and are generally incompatible with international human rights standards, as the

⁴ OHCHR, ‘UN Experts dismayed by US sanctions against Palestinian human rights organisations’, press release, 22 September 2025, available at: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/un-experts-press-release-22sep25/>

review timeline is undefined and may be prolonged due to incomplete submissions or the need for further verification.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the allegations received, the deactivation of Al-Haq's and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights' accounts by Google's YouTube raises serious concerns regarding the disruption of the human rights to freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of association, and the right to participate in public affairs, as well as these organisations' advocacy for human rights, international law, justice and accountability. As human rights organisations, they rely on digital platforms to communicate, advocate, and mobilize. The alleged deactivation of their accounts on YouTube silences their voice, undermines their work as human rights defenders, and contributes to a chilling effect on civic engagement, human rights monitoring, legal advocacy, and humanitarian assistance.

This disruption of Al-Haq's and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights' digital operations forms part of a broader pattern of measures undertaken by the United States that undermines the work of the ICC and those who cooperate with it. These actions collectively convey a policy of obstructing accountability efforts for alleged international crimes, both by penalising the ICC's institutional functions and by targeting individuals and organisations who support or engage with its proceedings. The use of sanctions and other coercive tools against actors associated with the ICC, including civil society organisations, constitutes unjustified interference with the administration of international justice.

Google has a responsibility under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to respect internationally recognized human rights, including freedom of expression, access to information, freedom of association, the right to participate in public affairs, and the right to legal representation, legal aid and effective remedies of victims of violations. Businesses must avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts and conduct human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, and mitigate such risks. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression has emphasized that "whether coerced or not into censorship, platforms should assess the human rights impact of their action and seek to mitigate to the extent possible" (A/80/341, para. 84). We regret that there is no indication that Google's YouTube assessed the human rights implications of the alleged deactivation of Al-Haq's and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights' accounts, to consider the impact on their advocacy and public engagement and the necessity of mitigating measures.

Civil society plays a vital role in promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. In the occupied Palestinian territories, where violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law are widespread and systemic, the work of organisations like Al-Haq and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights is indispensable. Disrupting their digital operations significantly limits their ability to carry out legitimate and protected activities, potentially violating the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression, the right to participate in public affairs and the right to effective remedies of victims of violations of international law

The right to freedom of association includes not only the ability to form and register organisations but also to carry out their legitimate activities, including human

rights monitoring, legal advocacy, and humanitarian assistance (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7). The inability to access digital platforms affects immediate operations and may jeopardize the organisations' legal status and long-term viability.

We also highlight Human Rights Council resolution A/HRC/55/L.30 on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which calls for an end to harassment, threats, intimidation, reprisals, detention, and expulsion of human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society actors. It emphasizes the need for accountability and effective remedies and expresses concern over the spread of disinformation and propaganda—including online—that may incite violence, discrimination, and hostility.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the allegations outlined above.
2. Please provide detailed justifications for the alleged deactivation of Al-Haq's and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights' accounts, including the grounds for deactivation and any relevant internal policies or procedures applied.
3. Please provide information on the measures your company has taken, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, to conduct human rights due diligence to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for adverse human rights impacts linked to your products and services, including those arising from account or content restrictions with regards to the alleged deactivation of Al-Haq's and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights' accounts. This also includes conducting heightened human rights due diligence in conflict-affected regions (A/75/212).
4. Please clarify whether Google's YouTube informed Al-Haq and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights or other affected individuals of the actions taken against their accounts or content, including notification in advance, and whether any avenues for appeal or review were provided.
5. Please describe the strategies and safeguards Google's YouTube has adopted to prevent or mitigate deactivation of YouTube account requests that may be inconsistent with international human rights standards, particularly when such requests originate from State actors.
6. Please indicate the steps Al-Haq and Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights would need to take to restore access to their accounts, including any procedures for appeal or review, and whether Google's YouTube is open

to reconsidering the deactivation in light of human rights concerns.

7. Please provide information on steps taken by your company to establish, or participate in effective operational-level grievance mechanisms, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, to address adverse human rights impacts caused by your company throughout your operations globally.
8. Please describe any other measures that your company has taken, or plans to take, to prevent the recurrence of such situations in the future.

This communication and any response received from Google LLC will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct.

Please be informed that letters on this subject matter have also been sent to the Government of the United States of America and to Meta and to Intuit with regard to the allegations raised above.

Please accept, Mr. Pichai, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Ben Saul

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism

Pichamon Yeophantong

Chair-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises

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Gina Romero

Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Mary Lawlor

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Francesca Albanese

Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967

Annex

Reference to international human rights law

United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

In relation to the above allegations, we would like to draw your company's attention to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (A/HRC/17/31), which were unanimously approved by the Human Rights Council in June 2011 and are relevant to the impact of business activities on human rights. These guiding principles are based on the recognition of: (a) "The existing obligations of States to respect, protect and fulfill human rights and fundamental freedoms; (b) The role of business enterprises as specialized organs or societies with specialized functions, required to comply with all applicable laws and to respect human rights; (c) The need to provide appropriate and effective rights and remedies when rights are violated."

The guiding principles also specify that commercial enterprises have an independent responsibility to respect human rights. Principles 11 to 24 and 31 to 31 provide guidance to enterprises on how to fulfill their responsibility to respect human rights, including through human rights due diligence processes. As noted in the commentary to guiding principle 13 of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, companies may cause or contribute to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities or be directly linked to such impacts through their business relationships. 'Activities' include both actions and omissions, while 'business relationships' encompass relationships with business partners, entities in their value chain, and any other State or non-State entity directly linked to their operations, products, or services.

Principle 18 emphasizes the essential role of civil society and human rights defenders in helping to identify potential adverse impacts of business on human rights. We also note that in its recent guidance on ensuring respect for human rights defenders (A/HRC/47/39/Add.2), the Working Group on Business and Human Rights emphasized the urgent need to address the adverse impacts of business activities on human rights defenders in particular.

The commentary on principle 26 of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights emphasizes that States, in order to guarantee access to remedy through judicial mechanisms, must ensure that the legitimate activities of human rights defenders are not impeded. Businesses have an independent responsibility to take the necessary measures to cease or prevent their contribution and to use their influence to mitigate to the maximum extent possible any remaining impact that contributes or may contribute to a negative impact on human rights (commentary on guiding principle 19) and should remedy any actual adverse impact that they cause or contribute to. Redress procedures should be impartial, protected from corruption, and free from political or other attempts to influence the outcome (comment on guiding principle 25).

In the context of the occupied Palestinian territory, the human rights responsibilities of business must specifically take into account the findings of the [Advisory Opinion](#) of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 19 July 2024 on the "Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied

Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, including as regards the unlawfulness of the occupation stemming from violations of two peremptory norms of international law: the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and the prohibition on the acquisition of territory by force.

Freedom of opinion and expression

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. The Human Rights Committee has stated that this includes political discourse, commentary on public affairs, canvassing and discussion of human rights. Under article 19(3), any restrictions on freedom of expression must be provided by law and necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or morals. As clarified by the Human Rights Committee in general comment No. 34 (CCPR/C/GC/34), such restrictions must conform to the strict tests of necessity and proportionality, must not be applied in a manner that discriminates against specific ideas, beliefs or groups and must always be “the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function”.

The Human Rights Committee has also recognised that "the freedoms of opinion and expression constitute a basis for the full enjoyment of a wide range of other human rights" and are integral to the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of assembly and association, which, in essence, enable individuals "to express themselves collectively and to participate in building their society." Together, and in conjunction with other related rights, they constitute the cornerstone of societies based on democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and pluralism.

Freedom of association

Article 22 of the ICCPR protects the right to freedom of association. In this regard, paragraph 9 (b) of Human Rights Council resolution 22/6 calls upon States to "ensure that they do not impose restrictions arbitrarily on potential sources of funding intended to support the activities of human rights defenders, in accordance with the Declaration [on Human Rights Defenders], beyond the restrictions normally applied to any other non-human rights activity carried out in the country, which are intended to ensure transparency and accountability, and that no legislative provisions criminalize or discredit human rights activities on the grounds of the origin of their source of funding."

The right to freedom of association includes the right to form and operate organisations for the purpose of pursuing legitimate objectives such as human rights monitoring, legal advocacy, and humanitarian assistance. In its general comment No. 25 (CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7), the Human Rights Committee has underscored "the exercise of this right shall not be subject to any restrictions other than those prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others."

Right to participate in public affairs

Article 25 of the ICCPR guarantees the right of every citizen to take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives. This includes the right to engage in political advocacy, participate in public debate, and influence decision-making at the national and international level. The Human Rights Committee has affirmed that states must ensure the free participation of civil society in political and public life, and that measures which arbitrarily exclude certain voices or perspectives from the public sphere are inconsistent with article 25.

Right to legal representation and legal aid

Under article 9 of the ICCPR, as interpreted by the Human Rights Committee in its general comment No. 35, individuals deprived of liberty have the right to access legal counsel promptly following arrest or detention. This safeguard is essential to prevent arbitrary detention and to ensure that detainees can effectively challenge the lawfulness of their detention. Similarly, article 14 guarantees the right to a fair trial, which includes access to legal representation and, where necessary, legal aid. The Human Rights Committee has emphasized that legal assistance must be provided in a manner that ensures equality of arms and the effective participation of the accused in the proceedings.

In addition, article 2(3) of the ICCPR affirms the right to an effective remedy for violations of rights recognized in the Covenant. This obligation is particularly critical when read in conjunction with article 7, which prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. States must ensure that victims of such violations have access to independent and impartial mechanisms capable of providing redress, in line with their obligations under both the ICCPR and the Convention Against Torture (CAT).

Human rights defenders

The Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Article 1 of the Declaration states that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels. This includes every person's right, individually and in association with others, to "form, join and participate in non-governmental organisations, associations or groups" and "to solicit, receive and utilize resources for the express purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms through peaceful means" (A/RES/53/144, arts. 5, 13).

Furthermore, article 6(b) and (c) provide that everyone has the right, individually and in association with others to freely publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; and to study, discuss and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and to draw public attention to those matters.