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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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By Betsey Piette

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'Reporting Palestine'

Philadelphia

With the rapidly growing Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation increasingly in the news, it is important to show solidarity with Palestinian journalists, often on the front lines of the struggle and increasingly at risk.



'Reporting Palestine' panel from left to right Majdi Bannoura, Dena Takruri, Laila Al-Arian, Shatha Hanaysha and Marc Lamont Hill, Palestine Writes Festival, Sept. 24, 2023. Credit: WW Joe Piette

"Reporting Palestine" was the topic of the final plenary session at the Palestine Writes Literature Festival at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia on Sept. 24. Moderated by award-winning journalist Marc Lamont Hill, host of BET News, the panel included four Palestinian journalists. Camera person Majdi Bannoura, with Al Jazeera, and field journalist Shatha Hanaysha were with Palestinian-U.S. reporter Shireen Abu Akleh

when she was shot dead by an Israeli soldier as she was covering a raid on the Jenin refugee camp on May 11, 2022.

Washington-based journalist Laila Al-Arian, Executive producer of Fault Lines, and Dena Takruri, Senior Presenter and Producer at Al Jazeera Network's all-digital video news network AJ+, rounded out the panel.

The panel opened with a short video acknowledging Abu Akleh's prominent role as a journalist covering Palestine.

Hanaysha spoke next, describing how Palestinian journalists have come to work in groups so Israeli soldiers would clearly know who they are: "We were all wearing blue protective vests that identify us as journalists and helmets. There were no clashes going on, but as Shireen started walking toward me the shooting started. She just fell down, not moving [shot in the head]. I started screaming for help, and we tried to reach her, but every time we tried, the Israeli soldiers would shoot. We felt the bullets passing around us."

Bannoura, who had been a colleague of Abu Akleh with Al Jazeera Arabic for 24 years, addressed the audience in Arabic. He described starting to record when he heard the first bullet and saw that his colleague, camera person Ali al-Samoudi (who has now recovered), had been shot. Bannoura offered his footage to officials investigating Abu Akleh's murder, but no one accepted his offer.

Laila Al-Arian raised that Shireen Abu Akleh's murder as a journalist was not unique in occupied Palestine. "Over the last 22 years, 20 journalists — 18 Palestinian and two European — were killed by Israeli soldiers operating with impunity. ... Israel has tried to claim the deaths were from Palestinian gunmen, but this was mostly debunked. Yet no one has been held accountable. If the murderer of a world-renowned journalist like Shireen cannot be held accountable, what does that say about the overall situation for journalists?"

A short video was played that featured pictures of the journalists killed since 2000.

CNN fired Lamont Hill in November 2018 after he spoke publicly in support of Palestinian freedom upon returning from a visit there. He asked the panelist about experiences they may have had in getting coverage from Western media.

In response, Dena Takruri described having a documentary she made of the killing of Abu Akleh blocked by YouTube. "In July 2022, the U.S. came out with a statement that concluded that Abu Akleh was killed by a soldier, but that 'it was unintentional'. Things have become so much worse in the last three years. A settler woman attacked my camera, but she was protected by soldiers. In Hebron, the streets are empty because Palestinians are not even allowed access to their homes."

Video of this panel and others from the Palestine Writes Literature Festival are available at PalestineWrites.org.

Rebellion broke out on Oct. 7 with Palestinian militants breaching fences that had turned Gaza into an open-air prison for 16 years. Among the first casualties when Israeli soldiers opened fire was freelance journalist Mohammad Al-Salhi outside al-Bureij, a Palestinian refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip. The Committee to Protect Journalists is investigating reports that at least two other Palestinian journalists were killed and three injured while reporting on Saturday's attack. (CPJ.org, Oct. 7)

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