

The European Legal Support Center (ELSC)

The European Legal Support Center (ELSC) is an independent, non-governmental initiative dedicated to protecting the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly of those who speak out and take peaceful action in Europe for justice and freedom of the Palestinian people. The ELSC is a joint initiative of Palestinian civil society, [The Rights Forum](#) in the Netherlands and European jurists. It is based in Amsterdam and will become operational in early 2019.

Why the ELSC is needed

In Europe, solidarity with the Palestinian people has been growing both in public opinion and among civil society organizations. In particular, the Palestinian civil society-led movement for Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) has been rapidly extending its network and supporters. Criticism of Israel's flagrant violations of international law, in particular its settlements policy in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), is also shared by experts and informed decision makers within national governments and EU institutions.

In parallel, Israel's far-right government as well as authorities and groups supporting it distort and suppress fact-based information about the systematic oppression of the Palestinian people. By silencing those who advocate for change, Israel and its supporters have been seeking to prevent European public debate and the adoption of measures which are required to ensure Israel's respect of Palestinian human rights and international humanitarian law.

In many European countries the attacks against individuals, civil society organizations and institutions supporting Palestinian human rights, including the right to self-determination, are escalating. Based primarily on a flawed definition of antisemitism that declares opposition to Israel's ideology of Zionism and practice of oppression of Palestinians to be antisemitic, these attacks include, among others: false and defamatory accusations of antisemitism or support of terrorism; threats; cyber-attacks; lawsuits; denial of access to public event/meeting facilities; closure of bank accounts and online services, as well as public policies and legislative initiatives that seek to restrict, outlaw or criminalize activities.

Our mission

The ELSC's mission is to protect the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and assembly, including the right to advocate for boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, and to bolster solidarity with the Palestinian people in Europe, by providing of professional legal support. Our mission and work are inspired by [Palestine Legal](#) in the United States.

Our work

The ELSC will carry out its mission primarily by challenging attacks on individuals, civil society organizations and institutions that speak out against Israel's violations of international law and support Palestinian human rights.

For this purpose, the ELSC will:

- Track and document incidents of harassment, bullying and repression of the rights to freedom of expression and assembly;
- Provide and facilitate legal assistance, including advice and defence in court;
- Raise awareness and train activists on their rights under relevant national, European and international law;
- Carry out legal and policy advocacy, and litigation of strategic cases.

In addition, the ELSC will also provide and facilitate professional legal support to peaceful, civil society-led advocacy and campaigns aimed at ensuring Israel's respect for international law and Palestinian human rights.

Legal status, governance and funding

The ELSC is hosted and represented legally by The Rights Forum in Amsterdam, an independent non-profit organization renowned for its expertise in international law, human rights and politics pertaining to Israel and the Palestinian people.

The ELSC operates in accordance with the bylaws of The Rights Forum and Dutch law. The Center is independent in decision making concerning its program, activities and fundraising and responsible for ensuring its financial sustainability.

Overall responsibility for ELSC operations and development lies with the Steering Committee which is assisted by the Advisory Board. This board, which is currently being formed, will be composed of jurists and academics renowned for their expertise in law, including the law of occupation, human rights law and the rights to freedom of expression and assembly in European countries.

A moderate budget for the start-up of ELSC operation in 2019 was raised successfully by Palestinian civil society. Additional donations and grants will be required in the course of 2019 to sustain the Center and to carry out and expand activities as planned.

Staff, Partners and Activities

ELSC activities will be carried out by staff and interns in Amsterdam in cooperation with practising lawyers and legal scholars who are based in various European countries, supportive of the Center's mission, and willing to provide specific assistance pro bono or for moderate fees. These jurists are essential for successful implementation of ELSC activities and will, therefore, be the ELSC's primary partners.

The ELSC will also coordinate with Palestine Legal in the US with the aim of complementing each other's efforts and amplifying impacts. In addition, the ELSC will seek coordination and cooperation with human and civil rights organizations, official national and European institutions and UN experts mandated to protect fundamental rights and human rights defenders.

In 2019, the Center has launched activities with a small staff composed of a jurist working as full-time ELSC coordinator and a part-time admin-finance officer. At least one intern will be recruited.

Activities in the first year of operation will include:

- Design of the ELSC's start-up 2019 work plan, based on consultations with groups, organizations and institutions that make up the Palestine solidarity movement in Europe about needs for legal support and preferred means of communication with the ELSC, and with jurists about possibilities and modalities of cooperation and professional support;
- Setting up ELSC databases; preparation of means and tools for communication with activists, jurists and the wider public, including the ELSC's webpage;
- Quality legal assistance/intervention in (a few) priority cases or issues that will foster confidence in the ELSC among activists and facilitate the development of the Center's decentralized, Europe wide network of supportive jurists;
- Fundraising to ensure sustainability and development of the ELSC.

Contact

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