



CAMPAIGN FOR THE RIGHT TO ENTER THE
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY (OPT)

A grassroots campaign working for the right to freedom of movement and residency in the oPt

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Petition to Israeli HC demands amendments to flawed policy for entry of foreigners to West Bank

A principled petition demanding that COGAT and the Civil Administration amend their "Policy on the Entry of Foreigners into the West Bank" was submitted to Israel's High Court of Justice on 18 February. The petition addresses numerous flaws in Israeli policy of issuing visas and how these violate both Israeli and international law. Among the amendments demanded were: clearly outlining terms for work and volunteer visas; granting foreign spouses of Palestinians the right to work; treating Jordanians wishing to enter or stay in the West Bank like citizens of other countries with diplomatic relations with Israel; granting foreign nationals multiple-entry visas; and nullifying the current restriction of work to five years and three months.

The petition was submitted by advocate Yotam Ben-Hillel on behalf of three foreign nationals currently residing in the West Bank. "We hope that the Court will demand that COGAT and the Civil Administration make fundamental changes to the policy and that the unjust wave of visa denials will finally be stemmed," Ben-Hillel says. The Court has issued a temporary injunction to prevent the petitioners from being deported. A hearing on the petition is scheduled for 3 June. The State is required to submit its response to the petition 3 weeks in advance of the hearing.

Over the past two years, foreign nationals wishing to maintain a presence in the oPt, whether for reasons of work or family unity, have faced [an alarming escalation in the rejection of these visa extension requests and in the frequency and range of arbitrary demands and conditions imposed by the Israeli authorities](#).¹ Of particular concern is an apparent decision by Israeli authorities to **restrict the number of years one is permitted to stay in the oPt** and a number of cases in which Israeli authorities have refused spousal visa renewals on grounds that **spouses are not permitted to work**. In some cases, the Civil Administration set an ultimatum for the foreign spouse: **quit your job or have your visa denied**. Other concerning developments reported by applicants applying for renewal are shifting documentation requirements without prior or official notification; lengthy processing periods that force applicants to overstay valid visas or leave the country with no clear procedures for returning; shortened and arbitrary duration of visas; issuance of the "Judea and Samaria" only stamp; restrictions on ports of entry/exit; demands for financial bonds of 20,000 to 80,000 NIS; and demands for applicants to come to interviews with COGAT personnel, during which some applicants have been subjected to shouting as well as confusing and intimidating lines of questioning.

These measures have been pursued even as the official policy on family unification remains stalled for over a decade now. "The large-scale denial of long-term visas leaves families without a durable solution, with the intended purpose of forcing families to leave Palestine," says advocate Ben Hillel.

Third state representatives, aware that many of their citizens have already been affected by changing practices, have been in communication with Israeli officials and expressed their concern. However, **no official communication by Israel regarding changes in policies or practices has been issued to date**.

[International academic networks](#) have joined demands that Israel end visa restrictions, noting the damage caused to Palestinian institutions of higher education. "These measures violate principles that should be protected, and indeed cherished, in any democratic state and are in contradiction of international humanitarian law and international human rights law," stressed the [Committee on Academic Freedom of the Middle East Studies](#).

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¹ Procedures provided by the Israeli authorities for entry and visa renewals for foreign nationals have always been opaque at best. Without functioning procedures for securing work and residence permits for the oPt or realizing the right to family unification, both those working in the oPt and those wishing to live with their families in the oPt have relied on extending B2 visitor visas by exiting and re-entering the country or applying to the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), generally submitting applications via the PA. This has been the only procedure available for foreign national spouses of Palestinians registered with the Israeli-controlled Palestinian registry, and for professionals employed by institutions based in the West Bank. Applicants have experienced varying degrees of success since about 2006. However, over the past two years, even these procedures have become increasingly dysfunctional.