

The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group

Annual Narrative Report

2008

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I. Introduction

The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group (PHRMG) was founded in December 1996 in response to the deteriorating state of human rights in the post Oslo era. Since then, we have struggled to create and enhance our reputation for a politically neutral assessment of fundamental human rights violations. While most Palestinian human rights organizations limit their attention to Israel, PHRMG examines all human rights violations regardless of what party is responsible.

PHRMG aims at establishing a pluralistic and democratic society in Palestine, addressing the Palestinian desire for political independence. Our goals are the following:

1. Monitoring and publicizing all human rights violations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories
2. Increasing the awareness among Palestinians about violations taking place
3. Providing legal assistance to victims of human rights violations
4. Participating in the building of Palestinian democratic institutions

The achievements of our activities are evident in our relationship with the international community, and more substantially with the Palestinian people. We sustain strong ties with international human rights organizations in addition to other actors devoted to peace, human rights, and democracy. Our publications, e.g. the *Monitor*, are widely read and highly regarded, both domestically and internationally.

PHMRG's success is also manifested in the growing trust, respect and cooperation it receives at the community level. Our field monitoring activities depend substantially on the information and cooperation of local organizations. These include media organizations, service providers, local authorities, victims and witnesses from whom the PHRMG field researchers take testimonies regarding human rights violations. Maintaining these linkages necessitates a high degree of sensitivity to the community's needs.

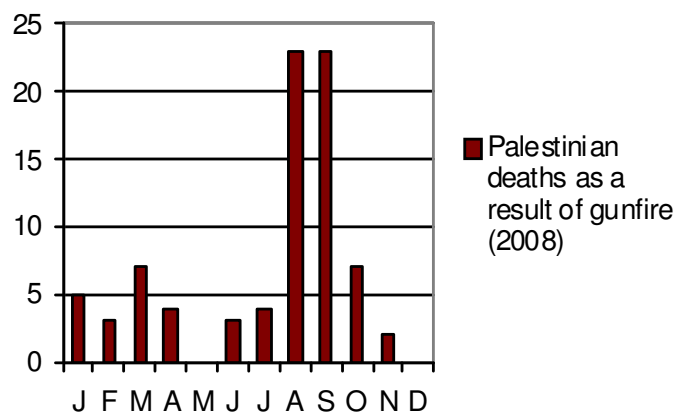
II. Statistical Overview Compiled by the PHRMG Monitoring Unit

A. General Intifada Statistics

(The numbers in the statistics do not include the fatalities since the end of ceasefire on December 19th and the Israeli war in Gaza!)

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Palestinians killed by Palestinians	39	65	11	32	15	55	346	97
Palestinians killed by the IDF	453	989	573	819	190	657	377	449
Total	492	1054	684	851	205	712	723	546

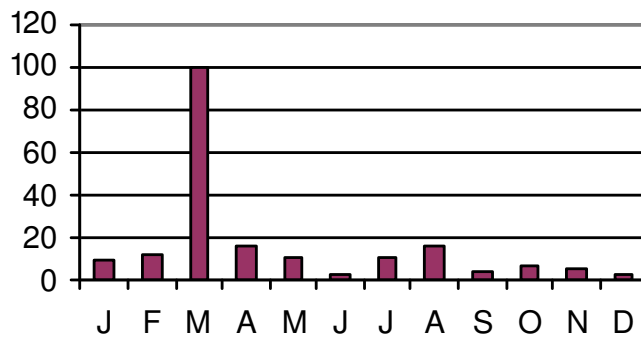
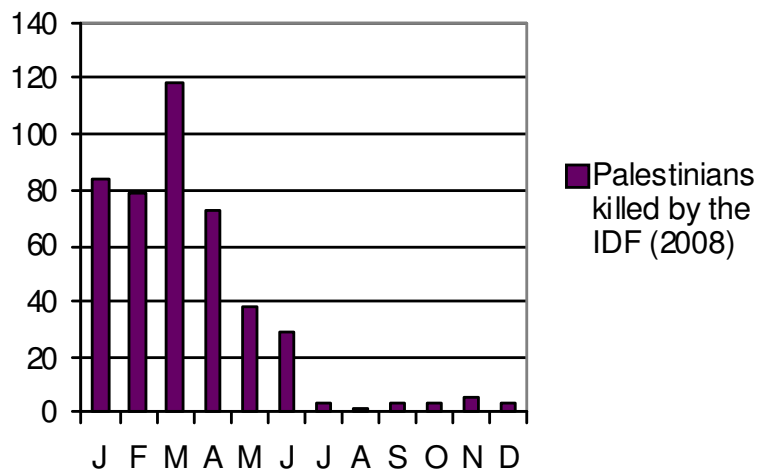
28.09.2000 - 31.12.2008	
Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces	6077
Palestinians killed by Palestinians	866
Israeli civilians killed by Palestinians	238
Israeli security force personnel killed by Palestinians	222
Palestinians killed by Israeli civilians	41



After the war between Hamas and Fatah in 2007, the numbers of inner-Palestinian fatalities due to gun fire have decreased significantly (81 in 2008 compared to 270 in 2007).

B. War between Israel and Hamas

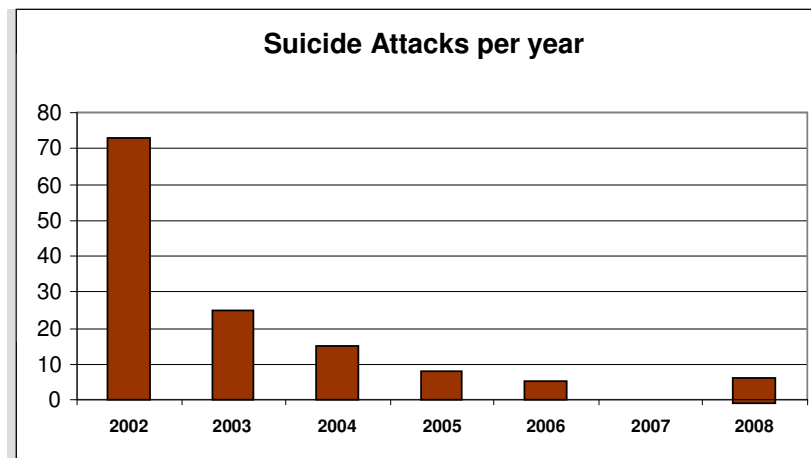
(Insert updated Press Release!)



■ Palestinians who died at a checkpoint after having been prevented from leaving Gaza for medical treatment (2008)

C. Suicide Attacks

In 2008, an unexpected and new tactic of suicide attack was carried out in central Jerusalem by young Palestinians from the Eastern part of the city, using a bulldozer in order to drive into people on the street. In the first incident on July 2nd, three Israelis were killed and 26 were injured. A copycat attack happened only twenty days later, which left 24 people injured and took place just down the road from the hotel where Barack Obama was due to stay. In September, a young man used his BMW to drive into off-duty soldiers on the street, wounding 19. In all three cases the perpetrator was shot dead. Links to terrorist organizations are unclear.

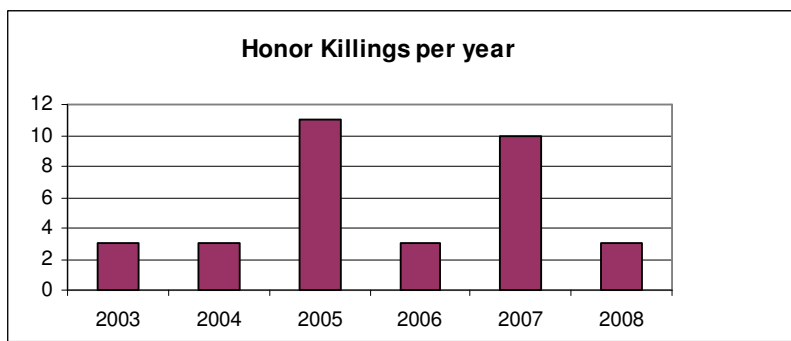


D. Honor Killings

International attention is focused primarily on the occupation and human rights violations committed by Israel but little attention is directed towards the situation of Palestinian women. The occupation is even used as an excuse for neglecting to address discriminatory structures and patriarchal traditions in Palestinian society.

The practice of killing women and girls in the name of 'honor' is an extreme expression of gender violence. It is a control mechanism used to keep women in line with traditional behavior and uphold patriarchal structures within society. The Palestinian legal and political systems pardon men who commit murder in order to protect their 'honor.' In Palestinian society, where traditional laws and practices are encouraged and promoted, these norms serve to uphold the male dominated political system emerging in Palestine today.

Honor crimes are difficult to distinguish. As relayed above, honor is sometimes used as an excuse to murder a female relative because such a claim reduces the perpetrator's sentence. Sometimes an honor related crime is marked as an accident or suicide. To kill a woman for 'honor' has little or nothing to do with perceived family 'honor.' 'Honor' killings are an expression of perceived male superiority over women and their power to decide their fate



III. PHRMG Research and Publication

A. The Palestinian Human Rights Monitor

One of the main activities for progress towards PHRMG's aim is the coverage of human rights issues in local media by means of the *Palestinian Human Rights Monitor*.

The Monitor is generally distributed throughout the Palestinian Territories as an insert in national newspapers. In order to make it easy to read for the non-academic public, an effort is made to avoid inherently political and juridical perspectives. The English edition of the Monitor is distributed widely among the international community.

Issues of the Monitor are selected carefully and reflect events and situations regarding human rights that are particularly relevant every month. The parties committing the human rights violations generally receive a copy of the report along with a request for their response before the report is published. If such a reply is received, it is published alongside the report, in order to facilitate initial dialogue on the violations.

PHRMG also provides easy access to its reports and research by placing feature length material on its website www.phrmg.org.

B. Monitor Issues in 2008

Legal Inequality and Youth in the West Bank

The dual system of Israeli civil law and military law applied in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as well as *de facto* repression of Palestinians through political patterns, such as their comparably lenient treatment in the court system, has a significant influence on the political climate among youth in this area. It dampens Palestinians' civil and human rights and curtails Palestinian youth engagement in community politics in the name of state security. On the other hand settler youth's participation in community politics and violent acts are promoted. The sense of oppression among Palestinian youth which results from this inequality further leads to more violence.

The Economic Impact of the Gaza Strip Crisis

In public discourse not much attention is given to the fact of how Israel's siege on Gaza has a tremendous impact on the economic situation in the Gaza strip. The unemployment rate has already reached a peak of 50%. Since Hamas' seizure of Gaza in June 2007, the humanitarian situation got still worse, producing a per capita income of around 186 shekels (60% of p.c. income prior to the 2nd intifada). Since then, more than 3,100 businesses have had to close and 65,000 workers lost their job. More than 80% of households now live below the poverty line, including most of the people working in the public service sector. As almost the entire industry and trade sector in Gaza depend on imported supplies which must pass through the Israeli controlled borders, their closures have led to a state of economic disrepair which may end in decades of economic dependence on humanitarian assistance.

Illegal Detainment by the PA

Since its inception in 1994, the Palestinian Authority has consistently violated international humanitarian law through political arrest, illegal detention, and torture of Palestinians throughout the Occupied Territories. This practice has been used either in order to meet Israeli demands, or in order to consolidate power and to weaken opposing parties.

Already before the Intifada, when the PA was forced by Israel and other countries to crack down on suspected terrorists, Yasir Arafat also initiated "terrorist sweeps" in order to weaken opposition. During the Intifada this practice continued. However, when put under house arrest, Arafat called for the release of all political prisoners, disregarding the security threat for Israel.

Mahmoud Abbas also launched arrest campaigns against Fatah's armed wing and Hamas in order to silence Israeli and Western pressure and was often condemned by large segments of Palestinian society and parts of the Arab World. Because he failed to meet Israeli demands for controlling terror, Israel executed its own arrest campaigns throughout the Territories.

When Hamas seized control over the Gaza Strip in June 2007, a new era of inter-factional Palestinian violence, political arrests, illegal detentions, and torture commenced. Hamas has thereby committed extensive human rights violations, e.g. the right to free speech, the right to non-violent expression of political beliefs and the right to assembly.

Human Rights Education at Palestinian Schools

The historical context of occupation in the OPT and the violence of the Intifada, on the other hand the reproduction of authoritarian teacher-student relationships in schools, reflecting a patriarchal authoritarian society, constitute two major challenges to human rights education in the OPT.

The Palestinian Authority has developed a significant legislative basis for human rights education. Policies for human rights and human rights education were at a burgeoning stage, but the situation after 2000 necessitated a change of focus; providing access to schools, protecting children's basic rights, providing emergency

psychosocial interventions and addressing poverty took priority over the design of teaching and learning environments for human rights education. Political change in the situation of the OPT is necessary for any genuine improvement in human rights as well as in human rights education.

Violence against Women and 'Honor' Killings

The patriarchal foundation of the society in addition to the stress of the occupation and the constant failure of the P.A. to address gender issues makes Palestine a complex and often dangerous environment for women.

Due to statistics regarding the high levels of male support for traditional ideas of female behavior and the harsh punishments for breaking such norms, male dominance over women in Palestine is still widely practiced. Honor is a powerful societal concept and a vital part of female submission to men, which serves as the foundation of Palestinian society. The right to discipline women for perceived misconduct is part of traditional tribal norms that are not addressed in the official legal system. Murder, in this case, is understood as disciplinary action rather than a crime, which reduces or eliminates the perpetrator's punishment.

Gender violence should be understood, not only as a women's problem, but also as a societal obstacle for development. The work performed by NGOs is impressive, but insufficient. The responsibility must be attributed to the Palestinian Authority, which, at this time, does not prioritize women's issues. Due to the legal gaps and strong societal discriminatory structures, women are being excluded and their rights disregarded. The national struggle against the occupation is used as an excuse for the neglect of and discrimination against women.

IV. PHRMG Programs and Proposals

Suicide Bombing

Healthy, bright young men (and recently women) are strapping bombs around their bodies at an escalating pace. The practice of "Suicide Bombing" as a form of resistance to Israeli occupation is gaining increasing popularity in Palestinian society, and is a cause of great concern to the human rights community.

There is little accurate information available concerning the real motivations behind carrying out a suicide bombing. The subject is controversial because it is difficult within the religious community to come to a consensus as to whether suicide bombing is permitted. It is also a challenging subject when discussed in the political context. There are arguments on both sides as to whether it is an effective tool in the arsenal against occupation. Many Palestinians, who in practice may disagree with suicide bombing, rarely vocally oppose its occurrence, thereby allowing this practice to continue uncontested.

We feel that this topic cannot be ignored when evaluating the human rights situation in Palestine.

Therefore PHRMG aims to conduct research on this topic, exploring the motivations behind undertaking such actions, the legal context in which these crimes are committed, the

responsibilities of the Palestinian legal system in upholding human rights, and the role that humanitarian organizations can play in eliminating public support for this merciless practice.

Democracy and Peace Education

As political chaos and lawlessness penetrate the Palestinian Territories, hope for democracy is rapidly diminishing among the Palestinian people. Nevertheless, through a unique educational program, we strive to instill Palestinian students with a commitment to building a successful Palestinian democratic state and to create a desire for peace. We also hope that this program will furthermore attract Palestinian and international attention to democratic initiatives in the region.

With the support of the Shalem Center (Jerusalem) and the Hope Flowers School (Bethlehem), PHRMG proposes to institute an after school democracy education program for 14-year-olds which will be linked to the UN administered high school in the Qalandiya Refugee Camp in Ramallah. Students will follow a ten-month curriculum that examines democracy's key ideas: legitimate leadership, limited government power, civil rights, equality before the law, and social justice.

Reform of the Palestinian Political System

Since the elections in January 2006, Palestine has started to go through an essential political process of creating participation, representation and the articulation of political opinions. When a country doesn't live in peace and safety, this process is difficult. More intense relationships among the various political bodies and the civil society could foster productive dialogues and thereby enable a much needed reform process of the political system. But in order to reach this goal there needs to be better mutual understanding and sufficient information about the other side.

PHRMG, in cooperation with National Endowment for Democracy, therefore intends to improve citizens' information, knowledge and awareness about the political system through workshops so that people become able to interact with all other political actors, at national and local level, and will increasingly take part in political dialogues. Citizens should learn that they can change their national situation not only by voting but also by advocating their interests towards their political leaders who implement laws.

Gun Fire among Palestinians under the PA

The formation and arming of Palestinian security forces introduced numerous weapons into the Occupied Territories. The 1995 Oslo accords provided for 15,000 automatic rifles and side arms, plus a few hundred heavy machine guns for Palestinian security forces. In addition to weapons used by members of the security forces, a flourishing and lucrative clandestine arms market exists which brings numerous additional firearms into the Occupied Territories. Palestinians' motivation to obtain weapons includes a lack of personal security due to settler violence, the lack of Israeli military intervention to protect Palestinian civilians and the general weakness of the PA and its law enforcement efforts. However, the proliferation of weapons seems to create insecurity and certainly makes interpersonal disputes more deadly.

PHRMG has collected information on deaths as a result of gunfire between Palestinians since 1995. Initial interviews have revealed that there are no restrictions on carrying security force weapons by off-duty security force personnel. The only clear restriction on use seems to be a prohibition against firing of these weapons at wedding celebrations. There is also a general lack of professionalism in the use of weapons which points to the need for training of security forces personnel. PHRMG seeks additional interviews with those who transport, market and purchase weapons in order to publish background information on gun-related incidents between Palestinians. We anticipate that we will be able to formulate policy proposals that will lead to increased personal security for Palestinian civilians.

Conflict Resolution Agreement

In recent years, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been going from bad to worse, leading the Middle East into a state of war, anxiety, and the loss of human lives. In the absence of the political will to impose the standards of international law on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, resolutions and principles cannot on their own bring justice to the peoples of Palestine and Israel. Under such circumstances, it proves to be urgent and necessary to establish an independent fact-finding mechanism to answer the calls for investigating human rights violations and developing strategies for restoring peace in the region. To understand more about the methods and techniques we can follow to attain a more peaceful society, it is essential that we construct a project to approach the situation on a regional basis in that we create an environment where Israeli and Palestinian human rights activists and NGOs can get together, discuss the level of human rights violations the region is undergoing, and propose solutions to minimize this endless cycle of human bloodshed.

The main goal of this project is to establish a peace agreement similar to "*The Good Friday*" agreement formed in Northern Ireland, bonding Israeli and Palestinian Human Rights organizations upon whom falls the responsibility of bringing to a halt this ongoing human conflict.

Coverage of Human Rights Issues in Palestinian Media

Prior to 1994, human rights advocacy and the media worked hand in hand as part of the struggle against the Israeli occupation and for Palestinian independence. The PLO itself championed the struggle against human rights violations and actively supported the media to report on such violations. However, with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994 the Palestinian leadership has accumulated a daunting record of human rights violations directed towards the Palestinian media. All material critical of the PA, that is published in newspapers and television, is effectively censored. The media is also a victim of more direct violations.

Our project will investigate the historic and current practices of the Palestinian media in the coverage of human rights, and the extent of its interaction with human rights organizations. PHRMG intends to increase awareness, solidify commitment to change, and protect the integrity of journalists, lawmakers, and the general public. The project is part of an ongoing effort to monitor media activity, and will be used as a basis for future research.

Peace Building Education and Development

At the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a persistent pattern of cultural misunderstanding and unsuccessful communication between the people of both sides. The conflict is not limited to the political and military areas, but it extends to include the cultural differences between the Arabs and the Israelis.

To understand more about methods for a more peaceful way of living alongside each other, it is essential that we construct a project on a regional basis in that we create an infrastructure where both Israelis and Palestinians work and interact together in order to achieve some level of understanding and acceptance towards the other side. The main goal of our project aims at strengthening communication among Israelis and Palestinians through organizing and implementing peace education programs (e.g. for students, youth communities, journalists), so that people on both sides learn about human rights, conflict resolution and cultural differences. It engages both sides in cooperative and integrated ways for the search of positive conditions which can resolve causes of conflict that produced violence. Learning ways to resolve issues and collaboratively work together helps people to accept differences, recognize mutual interests, and solve problems.

Public Education and Outreach Unit

The Palestinian people are suffering from violations committed by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA). Israeli violations stemming from ongoing occupation of the Palestinian Territories are well known due to coverage by numerous Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations. Palestinian violations are less well known but equally prolific. As a result of persistent violations of freedom of expression, the Palestinian public is frightfully uninformed about their rights, a situation that bodes poorly for the future of Palestinian democracy, and for peace in the region.

Our mission is to end human rights violations against Palestinians, regardless of who is responsible. Given the absence and/or ineffectiveness of democratic mechanisms of accountability in Palestine, our main strategy is to hold the human rights violator accountable before the Palestinian and international public through on-the-ground field research and human rights education. At the center of PHRMG's activities is our *Outreach Unit*, an administrative division whose activities include data compilation and human rights analysis, the bi-monthly preparation and publication of the *Monitor*, and the provision of both the administrative basis and outreach capacity of PHRMG projects with tangible human rights impact.

Collaborators in Palestine

The term "collaborator" entered the lexicon of Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the Intifada. In its most strict definition, the term refers to Palestinians employed by Israeli authorities with the intention of undermining the uprising. Exact numbers of collaborators since the Intifada are impossible to determine. Many Palestinians were coerced into "collaboration," lacking the intention of undermining the uprising. Also drug dealers and pornography peddlers were often condemned as "collaborators" because their activities were seen as undermining the values of Palestinian society. The imposition of the label "collaborator" carries with it a heavy social stigma and those condemned were subject to the "justice" imposed by local Palestinian factions who, along with their "masked men", served as judge, jury, and often, executioner of the accused. Neither human rights organizations nor private lawyers are willing to risk their reputations to defend suspected collaborators.

PHRMG will publish a bi-monthly report which examines the sensitive issues surrounding the fate of Palestinians accused of collaborating with the Israeli Authorities. These issues include the historic and current status of collaborators within Palestinian society; the treatment they have received at the hands of the Palestinian Authority and by society at large; and the role of

Israeli authorities in the absorption of collaborators. The project is part of an ongoing process of monitoring the conditions of prisons under the care of the PA, and advocating on behalf of victims of human rights violations occurring at these facilities.

Capacity Building for Freedom of Expression

According to several reports by independent media rights groups all material critical of the Palestinian Authority that is published in newspapers and television is effectively censored. PHRMG investigations have revealed that the media is also a victim of direct violations, including threats and physical torture that have silenced Palestinian journalists critical of the PA.

Our project aims at encouraging a bottom-up process of awareness raising around freedom of expression issues, education about specific rights, and solidification of commitment to democratic principals through the creation of a Human Rights Research Centre for research, publication and education of freedom of expression issues in Palestine.

The Centre would make available a computerized indexed archive of article clippings, links to local and international freedom of expression organizations, links to Palestinian and Israeli library search engines, updated reports on the state of human rights and the freedom of expression, relevant local and international journals, updated reports on current freedom of expression activities, as well as a bulletin board for upcoming events. In the long-term, the Resource Centre will have material about a large range of freedom of expression and human rights issues.

Killing for Honor

The practice of “honor killings” is a spreading phenomenon in Palestinian society. Each year a number of Palestinian women suspected of engaging in premarital or extramarital sex are killed by male family members seeking to preserve the honor of the family. The perpetrators of these crimes are often not prosecuted in the Palestinian legal system as the practice of killing women to preserve or restore family honor is tolerated by the government and Palestinian society in general. While other topics concerning human rights and particularly women’s rights have been opened for discussion in recent years, this serious issue remains a taboo.

Researching honor killings in Palestine is difficult as there is little information available and the public is generally unwilling to discuss the topic. The goal of our project is to draw attention to the practice of honor killings, and to encourage discussion of this issue in the Palestinian community. We aim to conduct research on this topic, exploring the motivations behind such killings, the legal context in which these crimes are committed, the responsibilities of the Palestinian legal system in upholding human rights, and the role that humanitarian and women’s organizations can play in eliminating public support for this barbaric practice.

PHRMG – Monitoring, Research and Documentation Unit

Monitoring, research and documentation have been the cornerstone of all PHRMG activities and the source of PHRMG’s successful awareness raising, reduction of human rights violations and strengthening of Palestinian democracy.

This project provides the monitoring and research base for PHRMG human rights outreach and legal activities. Four field researchers divide responsibilities into four geographic areas, three in the West Bank, and one in the Gaza Strip. Researcher responsibilities include keeping abreast of local developments, pursuing long-term monitoring tasks, and responding

to urgent human rights situations, in order to record the eyewitness testimonies of victims, witnesses and other actors.

A grant for this project would support the activities of our Monitoring, Research and Outreach Unit, in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

PHRMG Website in Arabic

Timely and efficient dissemination of information on human rights issues is of vital importance to the fulfillment of our mission. PHRMG reaches out to the international English speaking audience, including academics, diplomats, and journalists, through its distribution of 1,000 English language copies and through the maintenance of an English language website.

With regard to the Palestinian non-academic readership we distribute 26,000 Arabic language copies of our bi-monthly publication, the *Palestinian Human Rights Monitor*. Because current outreach practices are not yet effectively reaching an audience of Arabic speaking journalists and academics, in both Palestine and abroad, the proposed website in Arabic would greatly facilitate this vital outreach.

Human Rights Internship Program

PHRMG tries to give the opportunity to its staff to acquire further training in the field of human rights – a field in which most of its staff has only grass-root experience, but no academic training – by participating in seminars organized around the world on topics relevant to our work. We find that participating in such conferences and events allows the organization to acquire further skills, a different perspective on the specific human rights situation of Palestine, but also to build a network of highly useful contacts with other human rights organizations and activists across the world.