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**The Impact of New Technologies on the Promotion and Protection of Human  
Rights in the Context of Peaceful Assemblies in Palestine**

**Thematic Report  
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**Contribution submitted by:  
Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms**

**In Response to:  
Paragraph 21 of Human Rights Council Resolution 38/11 of 6 July 2018**

## Foreword

This report is carried out within the framework of Paragraph 21 of Human Rights Council Resolution 38/11 adopted on 8 July 2018, which requests the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a thematic report on new technologies, including information and communications technology, and their impact on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of assemblies, including peaceful protests.

The Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) has the honour to hereby make contribution to this thematic report by addressing the right to peaceful assemblies in the context of new technologies in Palestine within the framework of the following matters:

- Development of laws, policies, and programmes.
- Effective use of such technologies.
- Challenges posed by the interferences with the availability and use of technologies.
- Challenges posed by the use of new technologies.
- The impact of the use of less-lethal weapons and ammunition technology.

## The Impact and Challenges of Information and Communications Technology in the Context of Peaceful Protests in Palestine:

Since the adoption of Human Rights Council Resolution 38/11 on 8 July 2018, no laws, policies and programmes were actually developed in Palestine at the official level to address the impact of new technologies, including information and communications technology, on human rights in the context of assemblies, including peaceful protests. On the contrary, a presidential decree

on Cybercrime Law that was issued in June 2017 places further restrictions on the use of new technologies such as social media, resulting in the negative impact on human rights, including the right to peaceful assemblies. Furthermore, the draft law on information access is neither ratified by the Palestinian Legislative Council as it has been inoperative nor encompassed by a presidential decree.

However, since the formation of the new government led by Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh in April 2019, human rights situation, particularly media and press freedoms, is improving and no legal action was taken on the basis of opinion. In this regard, MADA has participated in many meetings with Mr. Shtayyeh and other officials to discuss the situation of freedom of expression and press, including peaceful assemblies, and was promised that a policy of openness is being adopted to address fundamental liberties, including freedom of expression and peaceful protests, stressing that information and communications technology is to be used freely without undue interference.

Palestine is considered one of the most owned and used Arab countries in the field of information and communications technology. The service of G3 came into effect by the beginning of 2018, making social communication between users easier for organizing meeting and events, including peaceful protests. The use of communications technology is evident and has witnessed a steady increase throughout the recent years. According to the Ministry of IT and Telecommunications, a steady growth in the use of telephone lines in Palestine was observed, where a total of 472,292 lines were calculated by the end of 2017 compared to 360,402 lines by the end of 2010, accounting for an increase of 31%. The mobile cellular subscriptions reached 3,997,206 subscribers by 2017 compared to 2,603,582 subscribers in 2010 with an increase rate of 53.5%.

Statistics of 2017 indicate that the overwhelming majority of households in Palestine have a mobile phone with a percentage of 96.6% (97.2% in the West Bank and 95.7% in Gaza Strip), where 84.2% of them own a smartphone (89.8% in the West Bank and 75.5% in Gaza Strip), 43.1% have a computer (48.9% in the West Bank and 34.0% in Gaza Strip), and 51.7% have internet access (60.6% in the West Bank and 38.0% in Gaza Strip).

With these statistical results, it can be inferred that new technologies, particularly information and communication technology are being made available for ordinary people and used effectively in favour of promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to peaceful protests. Although the mass majority of Palestinians are in possession of such technologies, particularly youth, university students, staff of public and private sectors, professionals and syndicalists, and the internet networks has never been disrupted for a long period of time or intentionally disconnected by the government to hinder organize a peaceful protest by means of new technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, many peaceful protest assemblies were unjustifiably suppressed and broken up by force.

The use of such new technologies is mostly restrained by outsider interferences. According to MADA reports, Facebook has closed thousands of accounts for Palestinians during the past months, and in September alone, a total of 34 news pages for journalists from the West Bank and Gaza Strip were closed followed by closure of hundreds of thousands of users under the pretext of violation of the rules of Facebook community. Some of these pages were completely closed and others blocked for a limited period of one month. Twitter has only closed one account for a journalist during this month.

The surveillance of Palestinian protesters made by the Israeli occupying power, Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and de facto authority in Gaza Strip by means of security and intelligence eyewitnesses and surveillance of social media remains the most challenging issue

facing peaceful protest assemblies in Palestine. Furthermore, the Cybercrime Law of 2017 is still considered a restraining factor to the use of information and communications technology in the context of peaceful protest assemblies in particular and in the context of digital information in general. MADA in this regard has been calling for the repeal or amendment of this law to be consistent with international human rights treaties to which the Palestinian Authority has acceded.

MADA Center believes that the use of new technologies, particularly information and communications technology, is of great importance to Palestinians for its impact on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protest assemblies. Therefore, the Center has recently launched a media campaign to promote and raise awareness of digital rights in Palestine under the slogan of “The Internet is a human right, not a commodity”. This campaign targets the Palestinian public in general and journalists in particular and aims at defining digital rights, including internet-related rights, and promoting public awareness of various violations against digital rights through the dissemination of awareness messages over social media, publications, TV and radio ads, and billboards in various Palestinian Governorates.