

Scotland Against Criminalising Communities (SACC)

Richard Haley (Chair, SACC)
c/o The Peace and Justice Centre,
St John's Church,
Princes Street
Edinburgh,
EH4 2BJ
07518 947 204
richardh@sacc.org.uk

www.sacc.org.uk

18 January 2021

Arlene Foster MLA,
First Minister,
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister,
GD 36 Stormont Castle,
Stormont Estate,
Belfast
BT4 3TT

Copies to: Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of Ireland

Medical Care for Dr Issam Bassalat - Open Letter to the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of Ireland

Dear First Minister,

We believe that urgent steps are needed to facilitate medical treatment for Dr Issam Hijjawi Bassalat, a remand prisoner in Maghaberry Prison. We urge you to ensure that the Governor of Maghaberry Prison meets his responsibility for Dr Bassalat's health, which we believe he can now only do by lending his support to any application that Dr Bassalat makes for bail.

Dr Bassalat has been suffering from a spinal problem for some time. The continued deterioration of his condition led him to consult with a neurosurgeon, Mr Abouharb of Kingsbridge Private Hospital, by video link on 6 January. Mr Abouharb concluded that Dr Bassalat requires surgery, that this should now "be graded as urgent", and that without surgery Dr Bassalat is at risk of irreversible nerve root damage and consequent paralysis.

Dr Bassalat continues to suffer from extreme pain and has difficulty walking, as he has for several months.

We understand that, in line with normal medical practice, plans for surgery can be progressed no further until Dr Bassalat can be seen in person by a surgeon. We also understand that there may be greater opportunities for surgery in Scotland – Dr Bassalat's home – than in Northern Ireland.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Northern Ireland hospitals and the difficulties that the pandemic puts in the way of arranging specialist person-to-person medical attention for prisoners, combined with Maghaberry Prison's lamentable failure to resolve Dr Bassalat's medical problem throughout the time – nearly five months – that he has spent there, all mean that bail now provides the only realistic roadmap to treatment.

Dr Bassalat is a Scottish Palestinian ophthalmologist who has been living and working in Edinburgh for many years. He is an advocate for the Palestinian people and for just, peaceful and democratic change in Palestine. A pandemic is no time to hold anyone in prison unless doing so is absolutely unavoidable. It is particularly problematic for someone suffering from the kind of medical problem that Dr Bassalat is facing.

Maghaberry Prison has a duty, under Northern Ireland Prison Rules, to provide "all possible assistance with any application" for bail. It also has a duty to ensure proper health care for prisoners. We believe that the Governor of Maghaberry Prison ought to consider what he can do to support a bail application by Dr Bassalat in order to facilitate his medical treatment. We are asking the Northern Ireland Executive to encourage the Governor to do this.

Signed (all individuals in a personal capacity),

Scotland Against Criminalising Communities (SACC), Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC), Edinburgh Action 4 Palestine (EA4P), Samidoun Palestinian Prisoner Solidarity Network, Scottish Palestinian Society (SPS), Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC), Labor for Palestine, International Solidarity Movement - Northern California, Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights - SPHR Queen's (Canada), Canada Palestine Association, BDS Vancouver - Coast Salish Territories, Africa4Palestine, Manchester Palestine Action, Karapatan Alliance Philippines, Irlandinformation - Ireland Information Group of Sweden, International Forum -the Middle East group (Denmark), Canada Palestine Association, BDS Vancouver, Association France Palestine Solidarité - AFPS 63 (Clermont-Ferrand, France), Giuristi Democratici (Italy), Just Peace Advocates (Canada), Jews for Palestinian Right of Return,

Andy Wightman MSP (Lothian, Scotland), Manu Pineda MEP (Spain, Chair of the Delegation for Relations with Palestine), Clare Daly MEP (Ireland), Councillor Gary Donnelly (Derry City & Strabane, Northern Ireland), Abdel Rahman Abu Hwas (member of the Palestinian National Council), Leila Khaled (member of the Palestinian National Council), Roger Waters (musician), Brian Eno (musician), Nisreen Mashal (Palestinian living in Spain), Teresa Sauri Carrasco (Valencia, Spain), Ziad Assayed (Cardiff, Wales), Suffian Kayyali, Mohammad Farajallah (Ukraine), Elias Nasrallah, Marwan Abdel-Al (Palestinian novelist and writer, Beirut, Lebanon), Ali Jaber (Kirkcaldy, Scotland), Ali Nasser, Ghazi Hussein (Edinburgh, Scotland), Dr Colin Cooper MBChB FFARCS (Scotland), Tareq Nasser, Kefah Kayed, Frank Thomas (Edinburgh, Scotland), Salah Zakut (Chairman of Arabic House organization, Kiev, Ukraine), Nidal El Astal (Ukraine), Raja Eghbarieh (political activist), Beleigh Jbara (London Palestino FC), Tasneem Ali (Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh), Zareen Taj (Muslim Women's Association of Edinburgh), Jamal and Carole Alubaid (Edinburgh, Scotland), John Tymon (Editor, The Palestinian magazine, London), John Porter (Glasgow, Scotland), Jamal Al-Oufi, Jan Benvie (Scotland), Bill Mair (Scotland), Naji Owdeh (Palestinian youth Action center for community Development – LAYLAC, Bethlehem), Hala George (Edinburgh, Scotland), Mary Inglis (France), Dr Eurig Scandrett (Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Scotland), Omar Faris (Chairman of Polish Palestinian Association), Paul Shortt (Dumfries, Scotland), Yousef Qandeel (Palestinian activist, London), Frank Barat (activist, journalist and author, UK), Luk Vervaeet (International Prisoners' News, Brussels, Belgium), Richard Haley (Edinburgh, Scotland), Julia Davidson (Edinburgh, Scotland),

Wael Shawish (Scotland), Dr. Evelyn McGregor (Scotland), Read Bassalat (Palestine), Omar Ghannam, Husam Freikh, Ali Nasser (Czech Republic), Dr Karen Bett (Scotland), Hamdan Al Damiri (Palestinian Community in Belgium), Jean-Louis Mignot (Honorary Ambassador of Belgium), Dr Khaled Hamad (General Coordinator of the European Alliance in Defence of Palestinian Detainees), Abderrahmane Ben Hida (engineer and political activist, France), Catherine Beaugier, Charaf Rifai, Mohamed Ellouze (lawyer), Kchaou Samia (Comité de Vigilance pour la Démocratie en Tunisie – CVDT), Jean-François Larosière (Président du Groupe de Douai de l'Association France Palestine Solidarité), Chris Williamson (former MP for Derby North, UK), Ricardo Vaz (Venezuelanalysis.com, Venezuela), Dr Ramzi Abou-Ayash (Germany), Norma Rishmawi, Mohammed Alnajjar, Mohammed Allouch, Khaled Sadi, Mounir Hussein, Dr Yehia Ghaddar, Nayf Alaydi (Malmö, Sweden), Moatasem Ashmawi, Michael Letwin (New York, USA, Former President of Association of Legal Aid Attorneys/UAW 2325), Sara Flounders (International Action Center, New York, USA), Professor Rabab Abdulhadi (Director and Senior Scholar, Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas Studies, San Francisco State University, USA), David Klein (Los Angeles, USA), Declan Owens (Solicitor, London, UK), Katie Miranda (Portland, Oregon, USA), Afifa Karake (Lebanon), Hanna Kawas (CPA Vancouver, Canada), Charlotte Kates (international coordinator of Samidoun, Vancouver, Canada), Professor Bill Bowring FAcSS (Barrister, Director of the LLM/MA in Human Rights, Director of Mooting School of Law Birkbeck College, University of London), Audrey Bomse (National Lawyers Guild, Miami, USA), Ken Stone (Treasurer, Hamilton Coalition To Stop The War, Ontario, Canada), Mario Martone (Research Assistant Professor, SCGP, New York, USA), Azadeh N. Shahshahani (Legal & Advocacy Director, Project South; past president, National Lawyers Guild, Atlanta, USA), Liliane Cordova (Valencia, Spain), David Palumbo-Liu (Louise Hewlett Nixon Professor, Stanford University USA), Andrew Phillips (Vancouver, Canada), Sabah Al-Mukhtar (Arab Lawyers Association, UK), Noah Cohen (Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA), Elena Cohen (President, National Lawyers Guild, New York, USA), Samir Salem (Los Angeles, California, USA), Luigi Ficarra (lawyer, Padua, Italy), Aurora d'Agostino (lawyer in Padua, Italy), Mohammed Alnajjar (Belgium), Al Jafari Ghassan (Romania), Patrick Higgins (Houston, Texas, USA), Marjorie Cohn (Professor Emerita, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, USA)

Coronavirus working arrangements – We may not be able to pick up mail sent to the postal address above. Please correspond by email if at all possible.