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Israeli Arab Dareen Tatour Sentenced to 5 Months in Prison Over Pro-Palestinian Poem

An Israeli Arab poet was sentenced on Tuesday to five months' imprisonment for social media posts, including a video of a poetry reading expressing support for Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation.

Haaretz [reports](#) Dareen Tatour, 36, was sentenced in Nazareth District court after being [convicted](#) in May of incitement to violence and supporting a terrorist organization. In October 2015, she posted a [YouTube video](#) showing Palestinians clashing with Israeli forces in which she reads her [poem](#), "Resist My People, Resist Them," which contains the lines:

Resist, my people, resist them...

For an Arab Palestine

I will not succumb to the "peaceful solution"

Never lower my flags until I evict them from my land...

Resist, my people, resist them

Resist the settler's robbery and follow the caravan of martyrs...

Tatour said she was not surprised by the sentence.

"I expected prison and that's what happened," she said. "I didn't expect justice. The prosecution was political to begin with because I'm Palestinian, because it's about free speech and I'm imprisoned because I'm Palestinian."

In addition to publishing the poetry-reading video, Tatour also posted a news story from Islamic Jihad, an armed Palestinian resistance group considered a terrorist organization

by Israel, calling for “a continuation of the Intifada,” or armed struggle against Israel’s illegal 50-year occupation of the West Bank and Golan Heights. She was also charged for posting a photo of a knife-wielding Arab woman shot dead by Israeli security forces and another image of Palestinian children killed by Israeli forces, beneath which she wrote “I am the next shahid.”

While “shahid” means “martyr,” the word has different meanings to Jewish and Arab ears. The court found that Tatour was guilty of incitement since she had used “shahid” to describe a Palestinian who was killed after stabbing an Israeli teenager.

“The combination leaves no interpretation of the word ‘martyr’ other than a violent interpretation that incites to terrorism, and to follow martyr-attackers,” the [verdict read](#).

However, Arabic language expert Dr. Yoni Mendel testified that Tatour was not calling for violence:

“The poem was written from the victim’s perspective. It deals with resistance against violence and occupation and does not call for violence itself..

The phrase ‘follow the caravan of martyrs,’ which was the basis for the prosecution’s case, was translated to Hebrew as ‘follow the caravan of shahidim’ as if it were a call for violence against innocent people. But in fact, the only two shahidim mentioned in the poem are the children Muhammad Abu Khdeir and Ali Dawabshe, who are both Palestinians murdered by Jewish extremists.”

“I never expected justice from the Israeli courts,” Tatour said in response to the May verdict. “I knew that I would be convicted of the accusations... I will... keep writing.”

Israel asserted that online incitement was fueling the wave of stabbing, shooting and vehicle attacks that began in 2015 in response to a series of hostile events. These included a Jewish settler “price tag” [arson attack](#) that killed 18-month-old Ali Dawabshe and both of his parents, as well as [tensions](#) over access to the Temple Mount, one of the holiest sites to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike.

Tatour’s prosecution was widely viewed as one of the most visible signs of a crackdown on Arab free speech. During her trial, Tatour’s lawyer cited Israeli police statistics showing that Jews who post explicit online calls for the murder of Arabs are not similarly arrested or brought to trial.

For example, in 2015, ultranationalist Israeli Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked [posted](#) a pro-settlement journalist’s call for genocide against Palestinians on her Facebook page.

“There is serious discrimination here,” Gaby Lasky, Tatour’s attorney, told the court. “If she was Jewish, there would be no case.”

“My trial ripped off the masks,” Tatour said at the time. “The whole world will hear my story. The whole world will hear what Israel’s democracy is. A democracy for Jews only. Only Arabs go to jail.”

“[This] court convicted Daren Tatour because... she spoke the truth,” Haneen Zoabi, an Israeli Arab lawmaker from the Joint List party, said after the poet’s conviction. “Arabs cannot freely give word to their feelings. And poets are forbidden from speaking critically.”

While Israeli Arabs technically have the same rights as Jews under Israeli law, many critics — including the [US government](#), the Jewish state’s primary benefactor and supporter — note widespread discrimination against Arabs throughout Israeli society, including in education, employment, housing and the criminal justice system. Arab critics frequently describe themselves as [second-class citizens](#) in a country some have called a Jewish supremacist state. A [recently-passed](#) “Jewish nation state” law has reinforced these beliefs, with even many prominent Jews [condemning](#) its legalized discrimination against Arabs.

Tatour’s case has attracted widespread international attention and sympathy. In the United States, more than 300 prominent literary figures, including nine Pulitzer Prize winners, have [called on Israel](#) to free the poet. PEN International, a worldwide writers group, also [weighed in](#), blasting Israel for convicting Tatour “for doing what writers do every day, [using] our words to peacefully challenge injustice.”