Release Mustafa Sheta, General Manager of The Freedom Theatre in Jenin!

Palestinian Mustafa Sheta, general manager and producer for The Freedom Theatre in Jenin, Palestine, was abducted from his home in Jenin by Israeli soldiers on December 13th, 2023. Without a trial, without sentencing, he has been incarcerated since that date. This week we have learned that his incarceration has been prolonged for a period of four months.

The Freedom Theatre in the Jenin refugee camp in the West Bank is a theatre and an active cultural center that has been conducting artistic and cultural activities for children, youth groups and adults for many years. It was founded with Swedish assistance and, for many years, received financial support from Sweden.

The Swedish friends association has been following the theatre’s activities for a long time and we have clearly seen the importance for the residents of the refugee camp, especially the children and young people, to be able to express their feelings and experiences through creative, cultural pursuits. The theatre’s motto, “Resistance through Art”, has offered an alternative to armed resistance. Many young people have found a pathway into the arts here at the center.

The theatre has been assaulted many times. Following the events of last October, Jenin refugee camp has been attacked by the Israeli army practically every night, resulting in extensive devastation. Several of the theatre’s young members have been killed and the theatre building has been partially demolished. Theatre workshops and productions continue despite these continuous attacks.

The theatre’s leader, Mustafa Sheta, is imprisoned in complete isolation, and has had one single contact with a witness who has reported that Sheta is living under extremely difficult conditions.

In an official report, the UN organ OHCHR condemns the extreme conditions under which Palestinian prisoners are held in Israel. Increasing numbers of Palestinians residing in The West Bank have been incarcerated since the start of the war. Released prisoners have reported experiencing and witnessing acts of humiliation, assault, rape, torture and even execution. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, these reports raise serious concerns regarding arbitrary seizure and inhumane punishment practices. The UN demands that all hostages in Gaza as well as all Palestinians imprisoned without grounds in Israel be immediately released.

The organization Swedish Friends of The Freedom Theatre has sent a letter to the Swedish government requesting that Israel be admonished to immediately release theatre producer Mustafa Sheta from custody.

*Background: The Freedom Theatre*

*At the end of the nineteen-eighties, Israeli activist and social therapist Arna Mer Khamis founded a children’s theatre in the Jenin refugee camp. In Sweden she was awarded the Right Livelihood Award for her achievement. The theatre was destroyed, along with most of the refugee camp, during the Israeli invasion of 2002. Thanks to the co-operative work of Israeli, Swedish and Palestinian enthusiasts, the theatre was rebuilt and was able to open its doors again in 2006. It became an important center in the camp, not leastwise for children and young people. Juliano Mer Khamis, the theatre’s artistic director, was murdered in a car beside the theatre in 2011. This crime has not as yet been solved. Since then, The Freedom Theatre has reconstructed its program with professional theatre for children and adults. Their company has had numerous international tours and worked together with theatres around the world, including projects in Sweden. In Jenin they run workshops and courses largely for children, young people and women and they conduct a three-year acting education created with the help of Swedish pedagogues.*

For The Swedish Friends of the Freedom Theatre

Lena Karlsson

Ann Mari Engel

Jonatan Stanczak