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U.S. House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
1139 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
Washington, DC 20515

July 9, 2024

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

We write to urge you to investigate *The Palestine Chronicle* and People Media Project for violating the law, particularly for providing material support to a known terrorist organization in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 2339B, for filing a false tax return in violation of 26 U.S.C. § 7206, and for failing to file a valid tax return and pay estimated taxes in violation of 26 U.S.C. § 7203. While the U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means (“Ways and Means”) already has referred People Media Project to the Internal Revenue Service (“IRS”) for revocation of its tax-exempt status,¹ it appears the group also may have violated several federal laws.

As you may know, it was recently reported that Abdallah Aljamal, a former spokesperson for the Hamas-run labor ministry and a “journalist” for *The Palestine Chronicle*, located in the Gaza strip, actively held Israeli civilians hostage in his home at the behest of Hamas,² a U.S. designated terrorist organization since 1997.³ During his time as a “journalist,” Mr. Aljamal was listed as a “correspondent” on *The Palestine Chronicle*’s website, but the publication later changed the description to “contributor” after news of his holding innocent Israeli hostages was

¹ H. Comm. on Ways and Means, *Letter to Internal Revenue Service Commissioner Werfel*, (June 10, 2024), <https://waysandmeans.house.gov/2024/06/10/chairman-smith-demands-revocation-of-tax-exempt-status-for-u-s-based-media-organization-employing-hostage-taker-in-gaza/>.

² Ohad Merlin, *Did Gazan who held Israeli hostages work for Al Jazeera and US-based charity?* THE JERUSALEM POST (June 9, 2024), <https://www.jpost.com/israel-hamas-war/article-805525>; Ronny Reyes, *Gaza journalist who wrote for Al Jazeera was holding 3 hostages in home with family, Israel says*, NEW YORK POST (June 9, 2024), <https://nypost.com/2024/06/09/world-news/gaza-journalist-held-3-hostages-in-his-home-with-his-family-israeli-military-says/>.

³ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM (accessed June 20, 2024), <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>.

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reported around the world.⁴

The Palestine Chronicle, which advertises itself as a publication that covers “freedom and democracy,”⁵ is also known as People Media Project, an American based 501(c)(3) organization,⁶ which has been organized as a charitable, nonprofit organization since at least 2012.⁷

In addition to its ties to Hamas and terrorism in the Gaza strip, it appears that *The Palestine Chronicle* and People Media Project may have ties to Iran. The publication’s founder and editor-in-chief, Ramzy Baroud, formerly served as an editor and executive for Al Jazeera,⁸ and has also written for *Kayhan International*, an outlet that reportedly is funded by Iran’s supreme leader.⁹ Notably, *Kayhan International* has had six of its published writers appear on state-controlled sites that were previously seized in 2020 by the U.S. government after finding that Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps unlawfully used them to further a global covert influence campaign.¹⁰

According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Qods Force “has enabled Hamas’ . . . terrorist activities, to include the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars in financial assistance and provision of weapons and operational training.”¹¹ Given the already well-documented connections to Hamas and terrorist activity in the Gaza strip, it is especially concerning that *The Palestine Chronicle*’s editor-in-chief also appears to have close ties to a publication funded by Iran.

Pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 2339B, “[w]hoever knowingly provides material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization, or attempts or conspires to do so, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than 20 years, or both, and, if the death of any person results, shall be imprisoned for any term of years or for life”¹² and, based on the facts available, *The Palestine Chronicle* and People Media Project appear to be at the very least complicit in supporting Hamas, and at worst full-fledged financiers of terrorism.

⁴ Isabel Vincent, *Gaza reporter who harbored Israeli hostages at his home wrote for US-based The Palestine Chronicle*, NEW YORK POST (June 17, 2024), <https://nypost.com/2024/06/17/world-news/gaza-reporter-abdallah-aljamal-worked-for-us-non-profit/>.

⁵ The Palestine Chronicle, *About The Palestine Chronicle*, THE PALESTINE CHRONICLE (accessed June 20, 2024), <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/about/>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Internal Revenue Service Determination Letter to People Media Project (Sept. 28, 2012).

⁸ Adam Kredo, *Iran's Ties to the 'Palestine Chronicle'*, THE WASHINGTON FREE BEACON (June 10, 2024), <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/irans-ties-to-the-palestine-chronicle/>; Politics for the people, *About Dr. Ramzy Baroud*, POLITICS FOR THE PEOPLE (accessed June 21, 2024), <https://ramzybaroud.net/about/>.

⁹ Adam Kredo, *Iran's Ties to the 'Palestine Chronicle'*, THE WASHINGTON FREE BEACON (June 10, 2024), <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/irans-ties-to-the-palestine-chronicle/>; Press Release, *United States Seizes 27 Additional Domain Names Used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to Further a Global, Covert Influence Campaign*, U.S. Department of Justice (Nov. 4, 2020), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/united-states-seizes-27-additional-domain-names-used-iran-s-islamic-revolutionary-guard-corps>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Press Release, *U.S. and U.K. Target IRGC-QF Support to Hamas and Other Proxy Groups*, U.S. Department of Treasury (Dec. 14, 2023), <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1987>.

¹² 18 U.S.C. § 2339B

In addition to the suspected material support of terrorism in the Middle East, People Media Project also appears to have filed inconsistent and possibly fraudulent information with state and federal governments regarding the amount of revenue it receives each year. According to the IRS, People Media Project has filed a Form 990-N – a form that organizations may file if their gross receipts are equal to or less than \$50,000 for that taxable year¹³ – every year since being granted tax-exempt status with the exception of tax year 2017, suggesting that its gross receipts have been below the \$50,000 threshold almost every year since 2012.¹⁴ However, based on its filings with the state of Washington, People Media Project reported much more than \$50,000 in revenue for the year in 2020, 2021, and 2022. In fact, People Media Project reported that its revenue was \$91,017; \$59,230; and \$92,036 for fiscal years 2022, 2021, and 2020, respectively.¹⁵

As you know, filing a false tax return is a violation of the law. Pursuant to 26 U.S.C. § 7206, knowingly filing a false federal tax return, which includes making any returns or statements which are asserted to be true, but which are not entirely accurate, is punishable by law, including potential fines or imprisonment for up to three years.¹⁶ Additionally, under 26 U.S.C. § 7203, it is a violation of the law to willfully fail to supply required information on a tax return, which includes information required under Form 990 and Form 990-N.¹⁷ Since People Media Project not only filed inconsistent information with the state and federal government but also failed to file a proper Form 990 for receiving over \$50,000 in gross receipts, DOJ would be remiss to not investigate this matter further.

Based on the facts and details stated above, we strongly urge the DOJ to utilize its authority to investigate *The Palestine Chronicle* and People Media Group for violating federal law, including laws prohibiting material support for terrorism and the filing of false tax returns. We are copying the Internal Revenue Service on this letter, given its role in investigating possible tax-related offenses. If you have any questions, please contact Ways and Means Majority Committee staff at (202) 225-3625.

¹³ Form 990 Series Which Forms Do Exempt Organizations File Filing Phase In, Internal Revenue Service (accessed June 21, 2024), <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/form-990-series-which-forms-do-exempt-organizations-file-filing-phase-in>.

¹⁴ People Media Project, Internal Revenue Service (accessed June 21, 2024), <https://apps.irs.gov/app/eos/details/>.

¹⁵ Corporations and Charities Filing System, Washington Secretary of State (accessed June 11, 2024), https://ccfs.sos.wa.gov/?_gl=1*1epu9e2*_ga*MTY5Mzc5MjkzMC4xNzE2OTk1NTE3*_ga_7B08VE04WV*MTcxODEyODQ2MC42LjAuMTcxODEyODQ2My4wLjAuMA..#/organization.

¹⁶ See 26 U.S.C. § 7206.

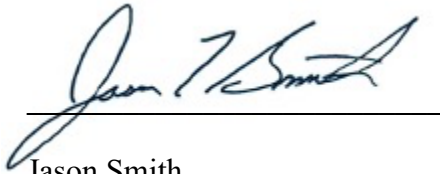
¹⁷ See 26 U.S.C. § 7203.

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Sincerely,



Jason Smith
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means



James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight



Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
Committee on Education and the Workforce

cc:

The Honorable Daniel Werfel
Commissioner
Internal Revenue Service
1111 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
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