The full response received by the IDF on November 11th 2026 has been included below. The invitation for a response by Free Press Unlimited has been included under the response.

There have been numerous cases in which terrorists operated under a civilian guise, including posing as journalists, to advance terror activities. In these cases, any action taken by the IDF against them was due to their involvement in terror activity and for no other reason.

The IDF strongly rejects the claims presented. The IDF does not intentionally harm journalists or their family members, and on the contrary, operates solely against military targets, in accordance with international law, and employs all possible measures to mitigate harm to civilians, including journalists. Any claim of intentional harm to civilians—including family members of journalists due to their professional activity, is completely false and entirely contrary to IDF values, orders, and operational procedures.

The invitation for response as sent by Free Press Unlimited:

Dear spokesperson,

I am reaching out on behalf of the international press freedom organization Free Press Unlimited. We would like to seek additional information and invite response on behalf of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) to findings we will publish in a forthcoming report about the delegitimisation of Palestinian journalists before and after they were killed, in particular the cases of Anas Al-Sharif and Hossam Shabat.

To ensure that we accurately reflect any views or actions taken by the IDF in relation to the matters included in the report, we respectfully request your response by **16 November 2026**. We have written separately to other relevant government bodies mentioned in the report. Please find a summary of the key findings of the report at the bottom of this email.

The report contains the following statements and concerns to which we invite your response:

- The report identifies the IDF as one of the key actors active in ‘a network of official and independent actors who were involved in constructing and amplifying delegitimization narratives’ about Palestinian journalists and their work. The report, among others, refers to social media posts in which the IDF refers to Al Sharif and Shabat as terrorists, its contributions to initiatives such as Media Watch Legal, and other public statements made by the IDF regarding these journalists. These posts include the X-post of 23 October

2024 which states “6 Al Jazeera journalists have been exposed as Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists”, and the posts that repeat this allegation with regards to Anas Al Sharif and Hossam Shabat such as those of August 11 2025 and March 25 2025.

- The report concludes that the IDF did not provide credible evidence for these allegations. The report notes that, in both cases, the IDF only provided an image containing a collage of screenshots pertaining to documents allegedly found in Gaza. The report states that the authenticity of these screenshots (and the corresponding documents) cannot be established, because the IDF has not released the original documents from which the screenshots have allegedly been taken - noting that several international media outlets have asked for these original copies to verify the allegations issued by the IDF. The report also notes that no evidence has been found to date that corroborates the existence and authenticity of these documents. The report furthermore observes that these screenshots do not deliver evidence relevant to the applicable legal threshold, which requires evidence of active participation in hostilities at the time of the attack. Other concerns cited include the fact that most of the screenshots included in the document are not dated, and contain, in the case of Anas Al-Sharif, contradictory information about an alleged military affiliation. The report also notes that the screenshot included in the document about Anas Al-Sharif does not substantiate the allegation from the IDF that al-Sharif received salary from Hamas.
- The report also notes that there is a pattern in which the IDF issues unsubstantiated allegations of terrorism regarding journalists the IDF targeted and killed. As examples, the report refers to the case of journalists Hamza Al-Dahdouh and Mustafa Thuraya, in which the Washington Post debunked the assertion that the journalists had posed an “immediate threat to IDF troops”; to the inconsistency identified by Reporters without Borders in the screenshot the IDF shared in relation to Ismail Al Ghoul; the IDF’ admission of having photoshopped a photo it posted of Ali Hassan Shuaib; and the list of 170 journalists published as part of ‘the Press Files’ in October 2026 of which 76 individuals are listed without any reference to evidence.
- The report argues that the IDF issued these allegations to uphold the claim that its lethal attacks on Al-Sharif on 10 August 2025 and Shabat on 12 March 2025 were lawful, and do not require further investigation nor accountability. This statement is based, among others, on the lack of credible evidence provided for these allegations, the pattern of issuing such allegations without providing credible evidence, and existing research that suggests the IDF strategically issues such allegations to evade accountability.

In relation to our findings, we also have a few specific questions to which we invite your response:

- In response to parliamentary questions, the Dutch government stated it asked Israel to share its evidence with the international community in cases in which

it claims that journalists were legitimate targets because they are part of a terrorist organization. Did the IDF receive and respond to such a request?
- The website of Media Watch Legal used to list the IDF as one of its contributors. This reference has since been removed. What is the current nature of the collaboration between the IDF and Media Watch Legal?
- The report references a meeting between (former) IDF spokesperson Avichay Adraee with Khaled Hassan on 16 September 2024. After the killing of Al-Sharif and Shabat, Hassan stated online that he shared evidence about Al-Sharif and Shabat with the IDF. Was information on their cases exchanged, either by the IDF or by Hassan?
- Haaretz reported in 2021 that the individual who runs Abu Ali Express, Gilead Cohen, had a consultancy contract with the IDF for two years. The IDF provided comment to this publication at the time. Does the IDF have any current collaboration or funding ties to Gilead Cohen?
- In September 2025, about a year after Hossam Shabat's assassination, Khaled Zakaria posted how proud he was to have shared evidence with the IDF: 'Do you know that I submitted a dossier with evidence of his [Anas Al-Sharif] and Hossam Shabat's involvement to the IDF, and shortly afterward they were eliminated? It's an achievement I'm proud of and always happy to remember'. Did the IDF receive such a dossier?

Any response received before **November 16th** will be incorporated in the report. If you have any questions, please contact me at [email address].

Kindly confirm receipt of this email.

On behalf of the Investigations unit at Free Press Unlimited,

Your sincerely,

Summary of key findings

The draft title of our publication is: "How delegitimization narratives of Gazan journalists were constructed online and reproduced through legacy media". The report will be published on our website and through our social media channels.

The report analyzes public and online statements in which official and independent actors have referred to the two Palestinian journalists as terrorists, propaganda operatives, or participants in hostilities without providing credible evidence of these

allegations. In the report, we refer to 'delegitimisation narratives': efforts beyond legitimate media criticism, in which journalists are portrayed in a way that discredits their status as a journalist or their journalistic credibility, without providing credible evidence of such allegations. FPU conducted digital and open source research to answer the research questions: 'How have delegitimisation narratives around killed Gazan journalists been constructed?' and 'How did these narratives reach legacy media – and thereby large audiences?'.

With regard to the allegations issued against Anas al Sharif and Hossam Shabat, the report outlines the applicable legal framework under international humanitarian law, which prescribes that journalists can only be legitimate targets during armed conflict if and for so long as they participate actively in hostilities. The report finds that the IDF provided no credible evidence that meets this threshold and supports the allegations made in these two cases. The report notes, among others, that the screenshots the IDF distributed to substantiate its allegations were unverifiable due to the refusal to release the original documents, remain uncorroborated, and do not contain evidence relevant to the applicable legal threshold (both in time and scope).
To research the aforementioned questions, the report relies on two methods: a chronological reconstruction of the delegitimisation campaigns that targeted Anas Al-Sharif and Hossam Shabat, analysing social media activity, official statements, thinktank publications and other publicly available material. Second, an examination of 98 publications from 14 major legacy media outlets across seven Western countries to assess how allegations against the two journalists were reported.

The first key finding is that delegitimisation narratives about Al-Sharif and Shabat were constructed and amplified through a specific network of both official actors, meaning (individuals employed by) the IDF and other Israeli government bodies, and independent actors. Our findings show that actors in- and outside the Israeli government and IDF reinforced each other's messaging about the journalists by reposting and adding to the same narratives, exchanging information about the journalists (e.g. OSINT-researchers handing over 'evidence' to the IDF and meeting with IDF officials), attending meetings organized by government bodies in which messaging was coordinated, and in some cases, even engaged in paid collaborations with Israeli ministries. In both cases, our analysis demonstrates that delegitimisation followed a recognisable pattern, moving from allegations of propaganda to allegations of terrorism. During periods of heightened international

criticism of Israeli military operations, delegitimisation activity intensified considerably. Second, our analysis of legacy media demonstrates that these narratives were frequently reproduced by international legacy media in ways inconsistent with fundamental journalistic safeguards. Despite the severe nature of the allegations, for example, a majority of the publications about Al-Sharif and Shabat in our sample did not demonstrate any attempts to independently verify allegations of terrorism made against the journalists. While the severity of these shortcomings varied, together they contributed to the wider dissemination and normalisation of these unsupported and severe allegations.

The report argues that insight into delegitimisation is relevant because the protection of journalists in armed conflict is contingent on their status as civilians. Accusations of participation in combat or terrorism can influence how the legitimacy of attacks on journalists is assessed and can thus impact accountability for violations of international humanitarian law.