



**Ambassador's Speech:**  
**Shireen Abu Akleh One-Year Memorial, 12 May 2023**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen and distinguished guests. I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here this evening. I would like to thank Palestinian Christians in Australia (PCIA) for bringing us together for this significant event.

Tonight, we are gathered to commemorate the life and legacy of Shireen Abu Akleh, renowned journalist and national hero, one year after she was assassinated by Israel.

Shireen was known and beloved across the region for her decades of dedicated work reporting on the realities faced by Palestinians and advocating for their human rights. She was the Voice of Palestine to millions around the world, and her family remember her as a "sister, aunt, mentor, inspiration, and best friend." After first studying architecture, Shireen changed career pathways to pursue journalism at Yarmouk University in Jordan before working at several news agencies. In 1996, she became one of the first field correspondents for Al Jazeera. In her own words, "I chose journalism to be close to the people...it might not be easy to change reality, but at least I could bring their voice to the world." Shireen amplified the Palestinian reality through the stories she covered and the lives she touched. Her vibrant career was cut too short, too soon.

While covering Israeli military raids on a refugee camp in Jenin, in the occupied West Bank, and wearing a helmet and protective jacket clearly identifying her as PRESS, Shireen was shot multiple times in the head by Israeli forces. Jenin and the refugee camp have been subject to several illegal, murderous raids by Israeli forces in recent months. One raid earlier this year was described as the "deadliest raid in two decades", highlighting the violent, brutal nature of the aggressor, of the coloniser.

Shireen was with colleagues at the time of her murder – other journalists who recount that they purposely chose a side street to slowly advance down, careful to ensure their presence would be visible to the Israeli forces further down the street. In the end this did not matter, and Israeli forces deliberately opened-fire on Shireen and the other journalists. The UN Human Rights Office confirmed in an independent investigation that there was no shooting beforehand, and the journalists had no warning. Shireen's colleague, Ali Sammoudi, was also severely injured in the attack.

In the aftermath of Shireen's murder, the Israeli government denied accountability and denied targeting journalists. Public pressure eventually forced the Israeli military into launching an internal operational investigation which unsurprisingly resulted in unsatisfactory conclusions. A forensic analysis facilitated by the United States concluded that it was through "tragic circumstances" the shooting occurred and that there was no intent to kill. This so-called explanation is not enough. Israel's killing of Shireen Abu Akleh is an established fact, and the circumstances around her death are clear. What is missing is accountability and justice.





The story of Shireen is not an isolated incident. Her assassination was part of Israel's well-documented, established pattern of violence and incitement against journalists. Shireen is one of over 20 journalists killed by Israel in the last 22 years, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. Not one person has ever been charged or held responsible for these deaths.

However, we can begin to feel hopeful about some recent developments, including submissions to the International Criminal Court. Last year the International Federation of Journalists, the Palestinian Press Syndicate, the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians along with leading human rights lawyers submitted a joint complaint asserting that Israel's targeting of Palestinian journalists and failure to properly investigate the killing of media workers constitute war crimes. Al Jazeera has also requested that their evidence be included in the investigations into Shireen's murder and at the end of last year, the ICC reported that Shireen's case would be added to its information collection. The Prosecutor of the ICC has all the necessary documents to pursue accountability, and we are calling on them to begin an investigation to hold Shireen's killers accountable. Any justice that does not hold Israel's top officials accountable for their crimes is a compromised justice.

May 15 is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Nakba, the catastrophic forced expulsion of hundreds and thousands of Palestinians to become refugees, the total destruction of hundreds of villages, the massacre and ethnic cleansing of our people. 75 years later, the Nakba still has not ended. Shireen was one of over 150 Palestinians killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank in 2022 – the deadliest year for Palestinians since 2005. This week, Israel launched another military aggression on the besieged Gaza Strip, killing over 25 Palestinians, including women and children. All of these deaths and destruction are part of Israel's ongoing policy of inflicting violence, suppression, and terror against the Palestinian people to sustain and further entrench its illegal occupation, colonial expansionism and apartheid regime with total disregard for the most basic principles of international law and human rights.

For 75 years, Israel has systematically committed violations and crimes against the Palestinian people, attempting to erase us. For 75 years they have failed. The Palestinian people remain steadfast in our resistance. We refuse to be erased and we refuse to be silenced. This is why Israel is so terrified of journalists like Shireen – They play a vital role in truth-telling and accountability, which is a terrible threat to a colonial regime built on human rights violations, fear, and impunity.

Here in Australia, I am happy to see community organisations standing together and honouring the memory of Shireen. Notable mentions this evening include the Arab Australian Federation, the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, the Australia Palestinian Club, the Australian Jordanian Community Association, Coalition for Justice and Peace in Palestine, Gaza Children's Fund, Friends of Sabeel Australia, and the United Australian Palestinian Workers. Continued advocacy work in Australia for Palestinian human rights around the world is the foremost role of the Palestinian community in Australia and its organizations. There is a huge support for the Palestinian cause, including recognition of the State of Palestine, from the Australian public, grassroots movements, civil society, former politicians, diplomats, and





academics. Over half of Australians agree that Palestine should be recognised as an independent state, while only 9% oppose the idea, as reported in a 2022 survey. On this note, I would like to sincerely thank the Palestinian community and solidarity and advocacy groups for your continued support for Palestinian rights and commitment to ending Israeli occupation, apartheid and colonialism in Palestine. It is through strong and continuous collaboration that important events such as this evening's memorial can be organised and solidarity between advocacy groups can flourish.

To this day, Shireen's family are still seeking justice and accountability. In a statement yesterday, they wrote "It's been an entire year since our Shireen was murdered, and our family shouldn't have to wait another day for justice." Safeguarding journalists is an international responsibility, and there is only one way to prevent the next assassination of a journalist: it is called accountability. Shireen herself once said "it is not easy to change the world," but she did – her life and work made an impact on the world. As we commemorate that tonight, let us look to her as an inspiration for our own actions.

Rest in peace, Shireen.

Thank you.