

## HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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HRW.org

Mr. Ibrahim El-Argani  
Chairman of the Board of Directors, *El-Argani Holding Group  
for Industry, Investment, and Development*

May 23, 2022

## Re: Ya Hala's Operations at the Rafah Crossing

Dear Mr. Ibrahim Ergany,

I am writing on behalf of Human Rights Watch, a nongovernmental organization whose work involves investigating and documenting violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by states and non-state armed groups in over 90 countries around the world.

Human Rights Watch's research team focused on Israel and Palestine has been investigating restrictions Palestinians face while seeking to exit the Gaza Strip. We intend to publish our findings in the near future.

To ensure our reporting is fair and accurate, we seek your response to several questions regarding Ya Hala's operations, your connection to the company, and your other activities, including through Sinai Sons, at the Rafah Crossing and as relates to Gaza. In order to be able to reflect your views and information in our forthcoming reporting, we would appreciate if you could provide us with a reply by Sunday, June 5.

Our preliminary findings indicate that Israeli authorities maintain sweeping restrictions and that Egyptian authorities, while keeping Rafah open more regularly to Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip since May 2018, have imposed onerous obstacles, including unnecessary delays and mistreatment of travelers, that exacerbate the harm caused by the Israeli closure. Our research indicates that those traveling via Rafah can apparently avoid the Egyptian obstacles and travel more expeditiously by paying hundreds of dollars to travel companies for *tanseeq*, or travel coordination, with Egyptian authorities.

We understand that Ya Hala provides a "VIP" *tanseeq* service, which expedites travel without delays in transit between Rafah and Cairo,

and offers flexibility on travel dates and the promise of better treatment by authorities. Our research indicates that Ya Hala has strong links with the Egyptian government and security establishment that enable offering these services. We also understand that you yourself have links with the Egyptian government and security establishment that may facilitate these and other beneficial arrangements, such as obtaining contracts from the Egyptian government for Sinai Sons, a company we understand you are also linked to, related to Gaza reconstruction efforts.

Companies have a responsibility under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to avoid contributing to human rights abuses.

To better understand and reflect your perspective, and that of Ya Hala and its ownership, on these issues, we would appreciate answers to the following questions:

1. Is Ya Hala a private company and, if so, who owns it? Are you an owner or director of Ya Hala and do you have any other formal role in the company, and if so, please specify? In what form is Ya Hala registered? Is it publicly traded? Where does it operate?
2. What operations does Ya Hala take part in at the Rafah Crossing and more generally in the travel of Gaza residents via Egypt? Does Ya Hala have a contract with Egyptian authorities setting out the scope of its activities? What, if any, arrangements or guarantees have Ya Hala been offered in return for providing these services? What approvals from Egyptian authorities did Ya Hala obtain in order to facilitate these activities?
3. How many Palestinians traveling through Rafah have used Ya Hala's services since May 2018? If possible, please break down the data by month and year.
4. How do Gaza residents apply for the "VIP" *tanseeq* package? How much does it cost? Are all residents eligible for this service? Does it conduct a security or background check on those using their service?
5. What services do Gaza residents purchasing the "VIP" *tanseeq* package receive? Does Ya Hala help to expedite requests to travel, exempt travelers from the criteria for entry to Egypt and/or facilitate better treatment of travelers by Egyptian authorities? Do those who pay for this package receive any other services, and, if so, please specify?
6. What kinds of activities does Ya Hala carry out in order to ensure travel and a faster response to applications to travel by Palestinian residents of Gaza? Does it coordinate contact between travelers and Egyptian authorities and if so in what way?
7. Does any part of the revenue received by Ya Hala from Palestinian travelers go to the Egyptian authorities, armed forces and/or the police?
8. Does Ya Hala have any links, to Egyptian authorities, armed forces and/or police, current and former, that assist them in providing *tanseeq* services? What about to the Union of Sinai Tribes?

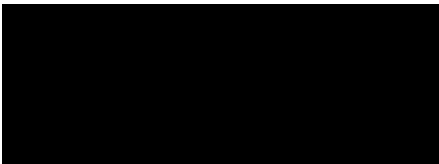
We would also appreciate answers to the following questions about other activities, beyond Ya Hala, that you may be involved in as relates to Gaza:

9. Do you also own the Sinai Sons company?
  - a. If so, what operations does Sinai Sons take part in as it relates to Gaza?
  - b. Does Sinai Sons have a contract with Egyptian authorities to handle contracts related to Gaza reconstruction efforts? If so, is the contract exclusive, forbidding others from providing services or taking part in contracts?
10. Are you involved in the export of products from Egypt to Gaza? If so, what products? What approvals did you obtain from the Egyptian government in order to facilitate these activities? Do you have a contract with Egyptian authorities to regulate these activities? If so, is the contract exclusive, forbidding others from exporting products to Gaza from Egypt?

We would be pleased to reflect the responses that you provide in our reporting if we receive a written response **by Sunday, June 5**. Please note that we may publish your responses at our discretion and when appropriate, either in full or in part. We would in addition welcome a virtual or in-person meeting with you or appropriate colleagues, if possible within the same time frame.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should have you have any questions or comments. Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,



Eric Goldstein  
Deputy Director  
Middle East and North Africa Division  
Human Rights Watch

