

Friday, 29 March 2013

## Journalist jailed for posting 'insulting' image of Abbas



A Palestinian court sentenced a local journalist to a year in jail on Thursday over a picture posted on Facebook that was deemed insulting to President Mahmoud Abbas.

The ruling against Mamdouh Hamamreh, who works for the al-Quds TV channel in Bethlehem, is the second this year in which Palestinians have been given jail terms over caricatures of the president.

Journalists and media watchdogs, saying Hamamreh was only "tagged" in the photo and did not create it, criticized the ruling and curbs on media freedom by the Western-backed Palestinian Authority.

The offending image juxtaposed Abbas beside a similar-looking man who plays the part of a collaborator with French colonial forces in an old Syrian television drama.

"They resemble each other in everything," a caption read.

Many Palestinians perceive Abbas as too conciliatory to Israel and resent coordination between Israeli and Palestinian security forces overseen by Abbas.

Palestinian rights groups were critical of the ruling.

"[Hamamreh] didn't even publish the picture. When images online are criminalized, it's a very serious violation of basic rights of expression," criminalized aid Riham Abu Aita of the Palestinian Centre for Development and Media Freedoms said.

"We don't have a king, we have a president," she said.

"This issue is between the prosecutor and the court, and the president has nothing to do with its

A court in the northern West Bank city of Nablus in February sentenced a local man to a year in prison for creating a picture of Abbas to make him look like a football player, and entitled it "the new striker for Real Madrid."

Anas Awad, 26, denied he had intended any offence and the president promptly pardoned him.