

ISSUE PAPER:
**ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT OF
PALESTINIAN PRISONERS**

Executive Summary

On Sept. 27, 2011, approximately 500 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails launched a hunger strike to protest increasingly discriminatory, inhumane and illegal treatment by the Israeli government – ranging from preventing access to books, educational programs and new clothes, to imposing solitary confinement on inmate leaders, to restricting visits by families and lawyers.

Three days later, on Sept. 30, the hunger strikers issued a call for international solidarity. UFree, an Oslo, Norway-based organization that promotes and defends the rights of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, calls on all human rights advocates to:

- Add their names to its [petition](#), calling on the Israeli authorities to stop the collective punishment and to use Twitter and Facebook to encourage followers to do the same.
- Email their country's Israeli embassy with the same demand. UFree provides suggested wording on its [website](#).
- Contact their legislative or parliamentary representative to ask him or her to raise the issue with their government's foreign affairs office.

Background

International law

Whatever land a person calls home, travels to or is detained in, basic human rights are guaranteed through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In 1990, the United Nations made clear that prisoners retained many of those same rights, in a resolution titled, Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners. However, detention without due process and inhumane treatment are rampant among Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

For example, the violations start with where they are held. Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention forbids occupiers from transferring prisoners outside of their own territory. Yet the vast majority of Palestinian prisoners are held in Israel -- making it impossible for many family members to visit.

Education is another basic right guaranteed to prisoners. The UN is now on record as stating that people in prisons retain “right to take part in cultural activities and education aimed at the full development of the human personality.” In contrast, since the beginning of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the Israeli government has made it almost impossible for Palestinian prisoners and detainees to pursue higher education – including children as young as 16, who are incarcerated with the adult inmates. For example, in 2011, more than 300 Palestinian prisoners were excluded for the third consecutive year from taking their secondary school exams – required to graduate and go to college.

When Palestinian prisoners are punished, often with no provocation, the penalty is harsh. PFLP Secretary General Ahmed Sa’adat has been held in solitary confinement for three years.

Palestinian Prisoners at a Glance

Since the extension of the occupation of Palestine to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, more than 650,000 Palestinians have been taken prisoner - one out of every four Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. Forty percent of male Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza have spent time in occupation jails.

Held without trial – Administrative Detention

At least half of prisoners are never given a trial. Israeli military commanders can detain an individual for up to six months without charge or trial. On or just before the expiry date, the detention order is frequently renewed. This process can be continued indefinitely. Administrative detention is often used against Palestinian writers, advocates or community organizers who are difficult to charge in military court. Administrative detention orders are issued either at the time of arrest or at some later date and are often based on secret evidence. Neither the detainee, nor the detainee’s lawyers are given access to the secret evidence. There are currently 221 Palestinians in administrative detention, including 20 elected parliamentarians of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Child prisoners

There are no juvenile prisons for Palestinians, and children often serve their sentences in the same cells as adults. More than 6,000 Palestinian children have been detained since 2000, and there were 209 Palestinian prisoners under 18 as of January 2011 -- 29 under the age of 16.

In March 2011, the Palestinian Ministry of Detainee Affairs published a new report documenting the torture of children as young as seven in Israeli prisons. Between January and March of 2011, Israeli soldiers abducted 150 children and all of them were interrogated during the course of their imprisonment – with many subjected to hitting, psychological abuse and other violence or threat of violence without a parent or adult representative present.

Women prisoners

An estimated 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and detained by the Israeli military since 1967, including 34 currently according to the July 2010 update from the Women's Organization for Political Prisoners (the latest numbers available). The Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association reports that Palestinian women prisoners are subjected to severe abuse during interrogation, including various forms of torture, denial of medical treatment and threats of sexual abuse and rape.

Longterm prisoners

At the other end of the spectrum are older prisoners, 143 of whom have served terms of more than 20 years. Palestinian Fakhri Barghouthi, for example, is the world's record-holder. The 54-year-old Barghouthi, originally from Ramallah, has been in custody for 3r years, after being detained on 4 April 1978 at the age of 21 for a suspected bombing. He has been in prison 12 years longer than he was free, and continues to be denied visits by his sister. Another is Akram Mansour, who has been jailed for 33 years and is quite ill with cancer.

2011 Hunger Strike

On June 23, 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu announced that he would use collective punishment of Palestinian prisoners – a type of blackmail – to try to force the return of Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit, one of its soldiers who has been a POW since 2006.

What followed were increasing numbers of prisoners sent to solitary confinement, diet restrictions for everyone, a ban on new enrollments in higher-education classes, and severe cut-backs in family visits and telephone calls.

For decades, Palestinian prisoners have engaged in hunger strikes to demand - and win - their rights, putting their bodies on the line to demand freedom and dignity for themselves, their people, their homeland and their nation. This time was no different. According to Palestinian Prisoners Affairs Minister Issa Qaraqea, approximately 500 inmates

are refusing to eat altogether, and others are saying “no” to food three days a week to show their solidarity.

Their demands include:

- Stop using solitary confinement as a weapon.
- Permit inmates from the Gaza Strip to have family visits, reversing a ban in place since 2007.
- Permit all prisoners to make phone calls and receive visits from relatives other than parents or the spouse. Remove the glass “separation wall” and allow children to touch their imprisoned parent.
- Stop tying prisoners’ hands and legs during family and lawyer visits.
- Allow prisoners timely access to needed preventive and medical care.
- Allow inmates to pursue secondary, graduate and post-graduate education.
- Stop all collective punishment in response to the perceived wrongdoing of one.

In response, the Israeli Minister of Internal Security has threatened to escalate the repression, moving all prisoners participating in the hunger strike into isolation and solitary confinement, and forcibly transferring them to other prisons in the occupation system. Prisoners are frequently transferred by occupation forces in an attempt to break up social bonds and disrupt organizing against prison repression. Israeli prison officials have reportedly told the prisoners that for each day they spend on hunger strike, they will be banned from family visits for one month.

Already, during one family visit, Israeli prison authorities confiscated the identity cards of the relatives of Palestinian prisoners Mahmoud Abu Wahdan and Raed Sayel. The families were told that because their imprisoned relatives refused to break their hunger strike, they were not allowed to visit them.

Elsewhere, in Asqelan Prison, the Israeli prison administration prevented lawyers from visiting detainees. A lawyer who came to Asqelan to visit prisoners Ahed Abu Ghoulmeh, Allam Al-Kaabian and Shadi Sharafa was banned from visiting the prisoners and informed that these three and all prisoners from the PFLP who are on hunger strike are prohibited from receiving lawyer visits.

In addition, female prisoners participating in the hunger strike – Sumoud Kharajeh, Linan Abu Ghoulmeh, Duaa Jayyousi and Wuroud Kassem – have been moved into isolation and solitary confinement. In the Ofer prison, Israeli authorities placed nine detainees – members of the PFLP – in solitary confinement and confiscated all their personal effects, clothing and other belongings.

Speak out now!

www.ufree-p.net

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