

Why

Palestinian prisoners are on

Hunger Strike

FACT SHEET



Why Palestinian prisoners are on hunger strike

1.1 - The issue of Palestinian prisoners is one of the worst consequences of the Israeli occupation. Since 1967, over 700,000 Palestinians, 20% of the population of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip have been detained. This number represents approximately 40% of the total male Palestinian population in the occupied territories.

1.2 - Today, there are about 6,000 prisoners in 17 Israeli jails and detention centres. They include six women and more than 200 minors.

1.3 - 330 Palestinians are being held in administrative detention with no formal charges having been brought against them in a court of law. 28 elected members of the parliament, and three former ministers fall within this category.

1.4 - Israel is currently holding all these Palestinian prisoners far away from their homes, and outside of the occupied territory. This constitutes a clear violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Article 76 of the Convention states:

“Protected persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein.”

Article 49 also states:

“Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.”

1.5 - Article 32 specifically prohibits “murder, torture, corporal punishments, mutilation and ... any other measures of brutality whether applied by civilian or military agents”. Since 1967, 202 Palestinian prisoners have died while being tortured in Israeli jails.

1.6 - Israel routinely tries Palestinians before military courts, none of which meet the most basic standards of international law; particularly the laws relating to the treatment of prisoners of war and people under occupation.

1.7 - In light of the above, there are now calls for the prosecution of Israeli officials at an international tribunal.



Solitary confinement

- 2.0** - Solitary confinement is one of the favoured methods used by Israel's prison authorities to penalize Palestinian prisoners. More than 1,600 prisoners began a hunger strike on 17 April under the slogan, 'we will live with dignity'. They are demanding an end to this torment that has become part of the vocabulary of Palestinian existence.
- 2.1** - Although the mass hunger strike commenced on 17 April to mark Palestine Prisoners' Day, several prisoners had previously embarked on hunger strike. Some have now passed the 50 day mark.
- 2.2** - Two of the most high profile cases during this period were Khadr Adnan and Hanan Al Shalabi.
- 2.3** - Toward the end of 2011, some prisoners went on hunger strike for about 20 days. Through Egyptian mediation, an agreement was reached between the prisoners' leadership and the Israeli authorities who undertook to end the practice of solitary confinement.
- 2.4** - Soon after, Israel broke the agreement and returned to the practice of solitary confinement, imposing even stricter conditions on prisoners.
- 2.5** - Prisoners are confined to a tiny 1.8 by 2.7 meter cell with not enough room for them to move or to store their personal possessions.
- 2.6** - Solitary confinement cells are specially designed be an additional source of psychological and physical pressure on prisoners. They are cement wall structures painted in dull colours with poor lighting, and often have very coarse finishing. In one side of the wall, there is usually a small opening that barely allows in air. The cells are very damp, which easily causes the spread of illnesses, especially breathing problems and skin diseases.
- 2.7** - Electricity supplies are routinely disconnected and visitation from relatives and lawyers are denied to prisoners.
- 2.8** - Israel uses solitary confinement as a punitive measure against influential resistance leaders as a way of crushing their resolve and weakening both their morale and physical capability.
- 2.9** - Prison conditions became noticeably worse after the incumbent Netanyahu government passed what is called the 'Shalit law', prior to the release of captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit.
- 2.10** - Ordinarily, prisoners who are not in solitary confinement are allowed out for one hour each day to receive sunlight. This statutory respite is not granted to prisoners in solitary confinement. They are taken out according to the mood of their jailers and that can be at any given time. Sometimes, they are taken out at six in the morning, even when it is raining and very cold. And if the prisoner asks to delay the break, they may lose the opportunity and not be taken out at all on that day.



2.11 - As for meals, as a rule, it is dreadfully substandard. Hence, prisoners often depend on purchases from the prison canteen when possible. This adds an additional financial burden on the individual prisoner, as well as his relatives.

2.12 - Prisoners held in solitary confinement are, however, denied access to canteens and are not allowed to receive money or gifts from relatives or other sources. They are forced to consume what they are given and invariably suffer from malnutrition, poor sight and blood deficiencies. Their meals are inadequate both in terms of quality and quantity. Indeed, prisoners are only allowed to request water at specific times which they find particularly difficult in summer when they naturally require a higher intake of liquid.

2.13 - The Israeli authorities use an exceptionally severe form of punishment called the 'sunduq' (box) where prisoners are sent to a very small cell that is 180 cm long and 150cm wide. It is barely enough to sleep or pray. It contains two containers; one for drinking water and the other to urinate. Those unfortunate enough to be placed here are only allowed to visit the toilet once a day. To overcome this obstacle, prisoners try to eat just the bare minimum in order to avoid the need.

2.14 - Prisoners in the 'sunduq' are not allowed to have watches or clocks. Nor are they allowed radios, newspapers or televisions. They are not allowed to purchase food or any necessity and are not even allowed to have a pillow.

Basic demands – to live with dignity and:

- An end to the arbitrary practice of administrative detention
- An end to solitary confinement
- An end to the storming of cells
- The lifting of all restrictions on family visits
- The improvement of medical care
- An end to relatives being humiliated at checkpoints while journeying to and from visits

