

Palestinian Political Prisoners



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The Call for Freedom and Justice

There are, today, approximately 11,000 Palestinian political prisoners held in the jails of the "Israeli" state. Palestinians, living under occupation and oppression for nearly sixty years, have been targeted relentlessly for imprisonment and detention for that time. Since the extension of the occupation of Palestine to the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, over 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 jail as a political prisoner, or held under administrative detention - arbitrary detention without charge. The effects of political imprisonment on Palestinian society have, thus, been massive and vast.

Who are the Palestinian political prisoners?

Palestinian political prisoners are often activists working to end the occupation of their land and the oppression of their people. In 1948, 78% of historic Palestine was conquered by Zionist armies - armies composed of Europeans who sought to establish an ethnically and religiously exclusive state on the land of Palestinian Arabs. Nearly one million Palestinians were made refugees, who have continued to struggle to attain their right to return to their homes and lands ever since. In 1967, the remaining 22% of Palestine - the West Bank and the Gaza Strip - were invaded and seized by Zionist armies, now identified as the army of the state of Israel. Many Palestinians have been working to end this brutal military occupation, obtain the return of the refugees, and liberate the land of Palestine. For that activity, they have been targeted by the occupying forces for detention and imprisonment.

Palestinian political prisoners represent every major Palestinian political organization. 41 members of the elected Palestinian Legislative Council are currently imprisoned, as are 7 ministers of the Palestinian government. Political leaders like Speaker of the Legislative Council Aziz Dweik of Hamas, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Secretary Ahmad Sa'adat and Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti are held prisoner with thousands of their fellow Palestinians. Palestinian political prisoners are men, women and children, activists and political leaders. There are currently 10,756 prisoners in Israeli central prisons, over 800 in administrative detention - arbitrary detention without charge - and 355 held for interrogation. These prisoners are not held because they are charged with traditional crimes, disturbing their communities or hurting their families. They are held because they, as Palestinians, organized, acted, or fought for the freedom of their land.

Palestinians' arrest and detention are covered by Israeli military regulations; there are over 1500 of these regulations at any given time, which can be altered at any time by the Israeli military commander of the region creating new regulations to which Palestinians must adhere - or be subject to arrest, detention and imprisonment. Prisoners are transferred to Israeli facilities for holding, detention and sentencing. Although it is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention for these prisoners to be transported outside the parts of Palestine occupied in 1967 - the West Bank and Gaza - they are often transferred to

the parts of Palestine occupied in 1948 - Israel - as 21 of 24 Israeli detention facilities are within those 1948 lines. Palestinian attorneys and family members from the West Bank and Gaza attempting to visit their clients and loved ones in prison are often turned back from the border and prohibited entry.

At least half of these prisoners have never been tried. Those who have been tried face a military trial, in which three military judges - two of which are not required to be trained in law - pass judgment on Palestinians' right to live, to organize and to resist in the face of a military occupation.

Because these prisoners are often extensively involved in activism and organizing, despite the horrid conditions of detention, Palestinian political prisoners have become a highly organized group, operating prisoners' associations, political organizations within the prisons and representative committees, and engaging in protests and hunger strikes that have drawn the attention of the world to their cause. Their voice within the Palestinian national movement is honored for its clarity, and for the sacrifices these prisoners have made for the freedom of their



Artwork created in prison by political prisoner Muhammad Rakouie.

people and the liberation of their land.

Conditions of Detention

Palestinian prisoners are often arrested in mass arrest campaigns; the Israeli military admits to arresting approximately 700 Palestinians on a monthly basis. Entire male populations of villages or neighborhoods may be rounded up and arrested.

A Palestinian may be detained for up to twelve days without being informed of the reason for his or her arrest or being brought before a judge. During this period of detention, he or she may be interrogated constantly. Following this period, the prisoner may be brought before a military judge and charged, sent to administrative detention or released. A Palestinian detainee may go through an initial 180-day period of interrogation; for the first 60 days of that period, he or she may not be seen by an attorney. The use of "moderate physical pressure" in Israeli interrogations is accepted, legal and common. Legalized torture in Israeli jails includes the use of short-shackling, "stress positions" - painful positions in which a prisoner is shackled for periods of time, beatings and squeezing of handcuffs, as well as sleep deprivation, exposure to temperature extremes for extended periods of time, humiliation and threats, and many other documented tactics of abuse. In June 2003, the Palestinian

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Prisoners' Society estimated that 90% of Palestinian detainees were tortured while in Israeli custody, and confessions and information extracted through torture are admissible in Israeli military courts.

Many prisons are archaic buildings; others are threadbare tent cities. Many prisons are infested with rats, parasites and other vermin. Detention centers are often unclean and prisoners are provided few supplies with which to clean their space and themselves; detainees sleep on often-threadbare mattresses without covers. Israeli jails are often heavily overcrowded, and Israeli prison ordinances allow for areas as small as 3 feet by 3 feet per detainee.

Palestinian political prisoners are systematically denied access to proper medical treatment. In many instances the detainees are wounded during their capture. In these instances and other medical situations, Palestinians are provided nothing but aspirin. They are not provided a change of clothing and instead must wear their blood-soiled clothing for months. Palestinians requiring surgery or other hospital treatment are put off for months. Indeed, over 200 detainees have died, either from torture or lack of medical care.

Palestinian Women Prisoners

There are, at present, over 100 Palestinian women prisoners held in Israeli jails. Over half of the Palestinian women detainees have never been tried, and twelve of them are minors. Female prisoners who give birth find their babies imprisoned with them until the child turns two, when he or she is released to family on the outside, and pregnant female prisoners are handcuffed to their beds during labor and birth.

Palestinian Child Prisoners

Thousands of Palestinian children have been detained by Israel. At the age of 12, Palestinians may appear before military courts, and at the age of 16, may be tried fully as adults. (In Israeli courts, adulthood begins at 18 for Israelis charged with criminal offenses.) There are no juvenile prisons, and Palestinian children often serve their sentences in the same cells as adults. Over 6000 Palestinian children have been detained since 2000, and there are 398 imprisoned Palestinians under 18 at the present time. They share the same treatment - torture and abuse - as their adult fellow prisoners, in contravention of international law concerning the rights of children.

Administrative Detention

There are currently over 850 Palestinian prisoners held in administrative, arbitrary detention, a system that dates from the old British mandate period of colonial control over Palestine. Palestinians are held for six-month periods of time, with no open charges against them, confronted only by secret evidence that is nearly impossible to dispute. These six-month detention orders are repeatedly renewable by a judge. In the past, Palestinians have spent up to 8 years in administrative detention, without charges or a trial ever being held against them.

Palestinian Political Prisoners from Israel

Palestinian citizens of Israel, whose rights and equality are denied by the apartheid regime, are also subject to political imprisonment. These imprisoned Palestinians include members of the Islamic Movement and Abna'a al-Balad, Palestinian political movements inside Israel. Ansar al-Sajeen (Friends of the Prisoners)

Association, a community organization that aids prisoners with legal and advocacy services within Palestine '48, was raided and its offices closed in late 2006. In April 2007, prominent Palestinian leader and member of the Balad party Azmi Bishara, an elected member of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, has come under attack and is under threat of exclusion from the country or political imprisonment because of his political activities.

The U.S. Connection

Israel is not the only country, by far, that holds political prisoners or that criminalizes dissent. In fact, the United States has done, and continues to do, the same thing; activists of the Black liberation movement, the Puerto Rican independence movement, and the Indigenous movement have been held for years as political prisoners. Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities have also been targeted for political repression. In prisons like Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. holds hundreds of detainees without charge or trial, for their alleged political activities, while in U.S.-occupied Iraq and Afghanistan, thousands are imprisoned. However, the connection to the U.S. is not merely the mutual use of political imprisonment. Every day, \$15 million of U.S. tax money goes to support the Israeli state - billions annually, with no strings attached.

The imprisonment of Palestinian political prisoners - some of the strongest organizers, activists and leaders of Palestinian society - is a deeply felt wound in the Palestinian community. The freedom of these prisoners, imprisoned because of their desire to see their homeland free, is a necessary part of achieving justice for the Palestinian people.

TAKE ACTION!

The use of U.S. tax dollars - in addition to the military and political support given to Israel by the U.S. government - means that this issue should be of concern to every person of conscience living in the United States. It is our money that is going to commit these crimes. The question comes then, what can be done?

INFORM OTHERS. Distribute this flyer, and others like it, in your community, workplace, school or place of worship. Most people don't know about what's happening in their name and with their money.

HOLD AN EVENT or organize an action about political prisoners. Please contact us for information about films and speakers about political prisoners.

WRITE a letter or op-ed for your local or school newspaper, focusing on the stories of political prisoners.

DONATE to a political prisoner support organization, like Addameer (<http://www.addameer.org/>) that advocates for Palestinian political prisoners in Palestine.

DONATE to Palestine solidarity and Palestinian community groups to support their public education efforts.

**Flyer created by: New Jersey Solidarity -
Activists for the Liberation of Palestine**

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This flyer distributed by:

**A note about terminology: The word "Israel" is used throughout this flyer. The "Israeli" state was created through and continues to be an illegitimate state based on the theft of Palestinian land, and the dispossession of the Palestinian people, without their consent. The use of the term "Israel" should not be read as an acceptance of the legitimacy of that entity.*