

World's media conceal the brutal treatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails

Jean Shaoul**30 November 2023**

Amid their rejoicing over the release of some of the Israeli hostages held in Gaza, the international and Israeli media have for the most part remained silent over the Palestinian prisoners freed by Israel and the appalling conditions of their arrest and detention.

To do otherwise would confirm that Israel is the aggressor in this one-sided conflict and that its mass murder and ethnic cleansing of Gaza builds on a record of unparalleled brutality against the Palestinians of a fascistic character.

The demand for the release of Palestinian prisoners was central to the al-Aqsa Flood operation of October 7. Almost every Palestinian family in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has had a relative imprisoned by Israel. Their only crime was resisting an illegal occupation maintained through savage repression.

As of Thursday evening, Israel had released 240 Palestinian prisoners in return for 99 civilian hostages, including 24 foreign nationals, bringing to 104 the number of civilians released (a further five had been freed earlier). A four-day truce was extended Monday for two days, and again Thursday for a further day.

Of the Palestinians released, all but a handful are women and children who have been kept in indefinitely renewable administrative detention, without charge, due process or trial, in breach of their human rights. Many were held in prisons inside Israel, not in the occupied West Bank, a war crime under the International Criminal Court's Rome Statute and in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Those released included:

- 22-year-old Ahed Tamimi, whose 2017 confrontation with Israeli soldiers made her a symbol of Palestinian resistance. Israel's national security minister, the fascist Itamar Ben-Gvir, had personally ordered her arrest over a social media post that her family denies she had anything to do with. She had been held for three weeks in an Israeli prison, without charge or trial, under administrative detention order.

- Fatima Shahin had spent seven months in prison. Initially accused of attempting to murder an Israeli, she was

never charged with any crime. She said she was denied access to a lawyer while in detention and to her family while she recovered from life-changing injuries caused by her arrest. She told CNN, "They accused me of carrying out a stabbing. It's not true. They opened fire [at] me. I was hit in the spine with two bullets... I have partial paralysis. I cannot feel my legs or stand up."

- 24-year-old Marah Bakeer was shot in 2015 twelve times by Israeli soldiers who alleged she had stabbed a soldier, an accusation she denied. She was left with permanent injuries and sentenced to eight years. She was due to be released in four months' time.

- Shorouk Dwayatt was sentenced to 16 years for stabbing an Israeli and attempting to stab another in East Jerusalem in 2015 after one of the men accosted her and tried to pull off her headscarf before shooting her.

- 59-year-old Hanan Saleh al-Bargouthi, the oldest female prisoner to be released, was in indefinite Israeli custody without any charge.

The freed are on a list of 300 Palestinians published by Israel. All are branded "terrorists" when fewer than a quarter have been convicted of any crime and the vast majority are held on remand pending trial. The overwhelming majority are under 18, mostly teenage boys, although there is one teenage girl and 32 women. Five are as young as 14. Most are relatively new prisoners arrested in the last year or two.

As crowds went to Ofer prison near Ramallah in the West Bank to welcome the prisoners, the Israeli military warned them to keep back and then launched tear-gas canisters into the crowd. At the Beituniya checkpoint near Ramallah, where the Israeli authorities released a group of 24 women and 15 teenage boys, soldiers fired rubber bullets and tear gas.

Ben-Gvir ordered a crackdown on celebrations. "My instructions are clear: there are to be no expressions of joy," he said. "Expressions of joy are equivalent to backing terrorism, victory celebrations give backing to those human scum, for those Nazis."

Apprehension stalks the celebrations, with many fearful of

rearrest. Following the 2011 Israel-Hamas agreement to release Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in exchange for 1,027 prisoners, many were later rearrested and had their sentences reinstated.

B'tselem, the human rights group, says that in September, Israel was holding 4,764 Palestinians in prison on “security” grounds, including 176 from the Gaza Strip. Of these, 2,222 were serving a prison sentence; 1,117 had not yet been convicted in court; 1,310 were being held under administrative detention; and 115 were simply listed as “detainees.”

Israel was holding a further 932 Palestinians, eight from the Gaza Strip, for being in Israel illegally. Of these, 534 were serving a sentence while 398 were listed as “detainees.”

Many of these youths are seized in mass arrest operations in the dead of night, blindfolded and cuffed, abused and manipulated to confess to crimes they did not commit. Some are as young as 10. One child was so young his hands were too small for handcuffing, while another, the youngest, was too small for the prison uniforms.

In 2012, British legal experts concluded that the conditions the Palestinian children are subjected to amount to torture. In 2013, the United Nations agency for children UNICEF deplored “the ill treatment of children who come in contact with the military detention system, [which] appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized.” Earlier this year, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called for an end to “all forms of physical or psychological abuse of children during arrest, transit and waiting periods, and during interrogations.”

After October 7, the number of Palestinians in Israeli jails soared to more than 10,000 as part of Israel’s campaign of intimidation and terror aimed at driving the Palestinians out of the West Bank. The security forces swept up around 4,000 Palestinian labourers from Gaza with permits to work in Israel. They were detained in degrading and inhuman conditions for several weeks before being released back into Gaza to face bombardment, the loss of their families and homes and enforced shortages of food, fuel, electricity, water and sanitation.

Israel has also arrested 3,290 Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Mostly detained in dawn raids on their homes for social media posts, the majority are being held in administrative detention. The “humanitarian pause” that started on Friday has seen no letup in the arrests, with Israel detaining nearly as many Palestinians as were released.

Prisons are full to overflowing and many must sleep on the floor without mattresses. Conditions have declined still further after October 7. Videos circulating on social media

show Israeli soldiers beating, stepping on, abusing and humiliating Palestinian prisoners who are blindfolded, cuffed and stripped partially or entirely.

According to legal rights groups, the prison authorities also halted medical care for at least a week. They have stopped family and lawyer visits; slashed exercise time in the yard to less than an hour a day; restricted access to electricity and hot water; shut down the canteen where prisoners could buy basic supplies; conducted cell searches and removed electrical devices. They have suspended visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross to the prisons where members of Hamas’ elite Nukhba force are being held.

Palestinians in the West Bank are subject to Israeli military courts and are routinely denied counsel. They face language barriers and poor translations, while mistreatment, abuse and even torture during detention ensure that most prisoners plead guilty under a plea bargain, leading to a conviction rate of 95 to 99 percent. Appeals are rarely allowed. This is in stark contrast to the 500,000 Jewish settlers who live in their midst, who are free to attack the homes and property of Palestinians and even murder them.

Heba Morayef, Amnesty International’s regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, said earlier this month, “Administrative detention is one of the key tools through which Israel has enforced its system of apartheid against Palestinians... Testimonies and video evidence also point to numerous incidents of torture and other ill-treatment by Israeli forces including severe beatings and deliberate humiliation of Palestinians who are detained in dire conditions.”

In 2012, a European parliamentary report described administrative detention as a tactic employed “principally to constrain Palestinian political activism.” In 2020, the then UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories Michael Lynk called on Israel to abolish the practice.

Israel can get away with this because it enjoys the support of all the imperialist powers that are now themselves slashing democratic rights and freedom of speech to suppress opposition to their domestic and foreign policies.



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