

“Welcome to Hell”: Torture, abuse and humiliation of Palestinians in Israeli jails is deliberate policy

Jean Shaoul
7 August 2024

B’Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, has published a shocking report revealing that the government has, since October 7, carried out a systemic policy of abusing and torturing thousands of Palestinians in its custody.

The report, “Welcome to Hell”: *The Israeli Prison System as a Network of Torture Camps*, cites the testimonies of 55 Palestinians released from Israeli prisons and detention centres over the last few months, almost all without charges: 30 from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 21 from the Gaza Strip and four citizens of Israel.

There are currently 9,881 Palestinians in Israeli prisons, up from 5,200 before October 7, of whom 3,432 are administrative detainees held without indictment or trial. In addition, 1,584 are held as Unlawful Combatants under a change in the law following the outbreak of the Gaza genocide. This change authorised the conversion of more than a dozen prisons, both military and civilian, for the purpose of holding Hamas members, including those who took part in the October 7 attack.

The demand for the release of Palestinian prisoners was central to the al-Aqsa Flood operation of October 7, including the release of Marwan Barghouti, the most well-known Palestinian behind bars. An estimated 800,000 Palestinians from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza have been incarcerated since 1967, which means 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.

The world’s corporate media has largely ignored

B’Tselem’s report. This is because Israel enjoys the support of all the imperialist powers that are now themselves attacking democratic rights and freedom of speech to suppress opposition to their domestic and foreign policies.

B’Tselem says the horrific details that have emerged about the abuse of detainees in the Sde Teiman military detention camp are just the tip of the iceberg.

Last month, a far-right crowd along with several legislators broke into the military bases at Sde Teiman and Beit Lid in a violent protest against the arrest of nine soldiers over the rape of a detainee in Sde Teiman detention centre. Tally Gotliv, a Likud Party legislator known for her provocative rhetoric, told the protesters that Israeli troops deserved total immunity, regardless of their actions.

B’Tselem said:

Thousands of Palestinians are being held in inhuman conditions and subjected to relentless abuse. Some do not know why they were arrested; many will be released without trial. This is the definition of a torture camp: a place that once you enter no matter who you are or why you were arrested—you will be subjected to severe, deliberate, relentless pain and suffering.

Their testimonies show that all Palestinians currently held in Israeli prisons are being subjected to harsh and arbitrary violence that includes sexual assault, humiliation and degradation, deliberate starvation, forced lack of hygiene, sleep deprivation, restriction

and punishment of religious worship, confiscation of all group and personal belongings, and denial of adequate medical care. The testimonies describe their treatment “in horrifying detail and with chilling similarities.”

They indicate a systematic and institutional policy of abuse and torture under the direction of the fascist Itamar Ben-Gvir, minister of national security and Jewish Power leader. They are carried out, under orders, in deliberate defiance of international law and constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

According to the report, at least 60 Palestinian prisoners have died since the start of the war—likely a gross underestimate—including 48 Gazan prisoners who died at army detention facilities and 12 who died in Prison Service custody. Some of the deaths appear to be the result of abuse and/or the withholding of medical treatment. This testifies not only to the brutality of their treatment but also to the utter degradation and moral depravity of the Zionist state and its institutions.

One of the prisoners, Fouad Hassan, 45, from Qusrah in Nablus District of the occupied West Bank, said, “We were taken to Megiddo. When we got off the bus, a soldier said to us: ‘Welcome to hell.’”

The former prisoners encountered, as a matter of deliberate policy:

- Overpopulation and crowding in cells
 - No sunlight or air to breathe
 - Violent roll calls or cell searches several times a day
 - Withholding access to the courts, aid agencies and legal counsel
 - Confiscation of personal possessions
 - Unrelenting psychological and physical abuse, including the use of pepper spray, stun grenades, sticks, wooden clubs and metal batons, gun butts and barrels, brass knuckles and tasers, attack dogs, beatings, punches and kicks
 - Sleep deprivation
 - Sexual violence, strip searches for the sake of humiliation and degradation, cases of gang sexual violence and instances of attempted anal rape
 - Denial of medical treatment that for some prisoners constitutes a death sentence or permanent disability
 - Inadequate and rotten food and starvation
 - Cutting off the water supply and toilet facilities
- They described living in constant fear and panic, facing guards who evinced anger and vengeance.

Guardian carried out a separate survey interviewing eight detainees, the majority arrested without charge and released without trial, whose testimonies matched those documented by B’Tselem. Last week, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a 23-page report noting the “escalating use of torture” by Israel against Palestinian prisoners since October 7.

Ben-Gvir, who as minister of national security is also in charge of prisons and the police, has boasted of transforming the prison system into a network of torture camps. He recently told the Knesset: “In Ketziot [prison] they say that I am crazy and I am proud of that. I am proud that we have changed all of the conditions.” Ketziot is the prison where jailers hung up a sign in Arabic and Hebrew saying, “Welcome to Hell.”

Ben-Gvir confirmed in a recent letter to the Supreme Court that food deprivation was ordered from the top, writing, “There is no starvation, but my policy does call for reducing conditions, including food and calories.”



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact