Palestinians released by Israel suffered mistreatment, abuse and torture

Jean Shaoul
23 October 2025

While the world's politicians and media have rejoiced at the return of the 20 live Israeli hostages held captive for two years in Gaza, and the bodies of some deceased captives, they have largely remained silent about the return of Palestinians.

The 1,726 detainees returned to Gaza appeared emaciated, bruised and scarred from tight cuffing, wearing grey prison uniforms, with shaven heads and overgrown beards and their faces making plain the suffering they had endured. Many were taken straight to hospital.

Their statements provide evidence of shocking mistreatment, including being deprived of food, water and sleep, denied medication and treatment, allowed access to the toilet just once a day, shackling in painful positions, suffocation, sexual assault beatings, abuse and torture that have resulted in some cases in permanent injury and even blindness. Verbal, physical, and psychological torture and humiliation were routine.

Shadi Abu Sidwa, a 30-year-old journalist, reported to *+972*, the online magazine, that the prison authorities had told him two weeks after his arrest that his wife and three children had been killed by the Israeli army in Gaza, only to find his entire family was alive and safe when he returned some 18 months after his capture in Al-Amal Hospital in Khan Younis, where he had sought shelter.

Raja Daghmeh, 30 years old, arrested in January 2024, said that he and other prisoners had been subjected to constant torture: "We expected to die at any moment from the torture." An interrogator had threatened that if he did not leave Gaza with his wife and child and go into exile, he would be hunted down and killed.

One can only imagine, in contrast, the uproar against Russia or any other opponent of the imperialist powers mistreating and torturing their prisoners in this way. Moreover, Israel's threats to resume all-out war, citing Hamas's inability to return the bodies of every dead hostage from a bombed-out warzone, was reported ad nauseam and generally sympathetically.

Under the terms of the ceasefire agreement, Israel promised—in return for the 20 live hostages and the bodies of 28 deceased hostages held in Gaza—to release nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, 88 of whom were released in the West Bank, 154 deported to Egypt and the remaining 1,726 to Gaza. Most of them had been seized after the start of Israel's genocidal war against the Palestinians and held without trial or charge. Of the 1,968 released, 250 had been serving life sentences on charges related to militant activity.

A further 9,100 Palestinians remain in Israeli prisons, where they face hunger, isolation and torture. Of these, around 3,500 are held without charge or trial under administrative detention that can be endlessly renewed by a military court based on a "secret file" that neither the detainees nor their lawyers have access to. As of last July, a further 2,850 were being held indefinitely, without even an administrative detention order, under the widely condemned Unlawful Combatants Law. Many have spent months behind bars.

Of those prisoners serving sentences based on clear charges, these were typically for belonging to political organizations and trade unions, participating in protests or throwing stones. Since the start of the genocide, the most common conviction has been for "incitement," which can cover anything from social media postings to addressing public gatherings and even raising flags of the Palestinian political factions.

Israel has for decades imprisoned Palestinians—around one million from the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza in total since the 1967 Arab Israeli war. Almost every Palestinian family in the occupied territories has had a relative imprisoned by Israel, for resisting an illegal occupation maintained through savage repression.

Marwan Barghouti, a Fatah leader tipped as a possible successor to the 89-year-old Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, was to have been included among those released. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu withdrew his name from the ceasefire agreement. Imprisoned since 2002, Barghouti has faced long spells in solitary confinement and, since the start of the war, ever worsening conditions.

Last August, the fascist National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir threatened Barghouti in his cell, saying, "Whoever messes with the people of Israel, whoever murders our children, whoever murders our women, we will obliterate them." Last month, eight Israeli guards beat Barghouti unconscious while transferring prisons.

© World Socialist Web Site

Atrocious conditions in Israeli prisons—a deliberate policy

The statements from released prisoners confirm the reports of Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor and B'Tselem published last year about the inhumane prison conditions, as well as Israel's *Channel 14* showing an Israeli prison officer describing the abusive treatment being meted out. Images of abuse and torture were widely disseminated on social media in the photos and videos shot by Israeli soldiers. International media have shown images of detainees wearing just their underpants, bound and blindfolded, being dragged across gravel and stomped and kicked in their heads and genitals.

This is part of a broader strategy of terrorizing the Palestinians and demonstrating the futility of resistance. Already appalling prison conditions had been deteriorating ever since Ben-Gvir, leader of the ultra-nationalist Jewish Power party, became Minister of National Security with control of the police and the Israel Prison Service (IPS) in December 2022. He immediately declared, "[O]ne of the highest goals I have set for myself is to worsen the conditions of the terrorists in the prisons, and to reduce their rights to the minimum required by law."

Ben-Gvir reduced shower time and closed the prisoner-run bakeries in Ketziot and Nafha prisons. Conditions were so bad that in August 2023, over 1,000 prisoners—one-fifth of Palestinians incarcerated at the time—went on hunger strike in protest. Ben-Gvir's response was to sharply reduce family visits.

At the start of the war, there were 5,200 Palestinians in Israeli jails, soaring to more than 10,000 when Gazan workers and patients legally in Israel on October 7 were taken into custody. Israel arrested at least 12,100 Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including more than 440 women and 795 children, in the first 15 months of the war, according to rights groups. Within Israel, between 2,700 and 4,000 Palestinian citizens have been arrested, detained or interrogated.

Among those detained are at least 250 healthcare workers seized from hospitals and clinics, including Adnan al-Bursh, head of orthopedics at al-Shifa Hospital, who was detained while working at al-Awda Hospital and tortured to death last year; and Dr. Hossam Abu Safiya, director of Kamal Adwan Hospital, who was also tortured. Under the ceasefire agreement, just 55 doctors and nurses were to be freed, and not all releases have been confirmed.

Following the start of the war, under orders from Ben Gvir, the IPS slashed access to water and electricity and cut food to a "minimal menu" in what amounted to a starvation policy. The security forces were let loose, assaulting prisoners and seizing their possessions, moving some to isolation and cramming others into cells designed to hold just half their actual numbers.

The IPS imposed bans on visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross and family members and made phone calls to relatives and access to lawyers almost impossible.

At least 135 Palestinian bodies show signs of torture and execution

Israel has returned about 195 of the 1,500 Palestinian bodies from Gaza held at Sde Teiman. At least 135 of the bodies were blindfolded and bound, suggesting they had been tortured and then killed.

The Knesset, Israel's parliament, established Sde Teiman as a prison for "unlawful combatants" immediately after the outbreak of the Gaza war to hold Hamas members, including those who took part in the October 7 attack. It is known as Israel's Guantanamo.

According to doctors in Khan Younis, official examinations and field observations "clearly indicate that Israel carried out acts of murder, summary executions and systematic torture against many of the Palestinians". There were "clear signs of direct gunfire at point-blank range and bodies crushed beneath Israeli tank tracks".

Fifty-four of the bodies so far returned were so badly mutilated they could not be identified and had to be buried in a mass funeral in Deir El-Balah in Gaza.

The imperialist powers have turned a blind eye to Israel's torture and abuse of the Palestinians, with the Trump administration refusing to even demand the release of Mohammed Ibrahim, a 16-year-old boy who is a US citizen and has lost one quarter of his body weight since February. They all support Israel and are themselves attacking democratic rights and freedom of speech to suppress opposition to their domestic and foreign policies.

That the Arab regimes along with Abbas and Fatah's Central Committee have remained silent about Israel's abuse and torture of prisoners testifies to their perfidy and collusion with Israel in suppressing the Palestinians.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site