



Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK  
المنظمة العربية لحقوق الإنسان في بريطانيا

# Sick Palestinian political prisoners in **Israeli jails**





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## *Introduction:*

*Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails have long been held under harsh conditions imposed by Israeli prison officials. Many are deprived of visitation rights, and are held in solitary confinement or in prisons too far from their original place of residence so as to render any visits effectively impossible.*

*Prisoners are usually transferred in badly maintained buses for hours at a time without any thought to their most basic of needs. Whilst held in custody, their prison cells are raided on regular basis, during which, many inmates have reported being physically assaulted with batons, rifles and teargas, or forced to strip naked for inspection. Most requests made by prisoners to continue their education whilst in prison are denied. Hefty fines and medical neglect are also major issues that prisoners have complained about.*

*“Sick Political prisoners at Israeli jails” refers to Palestinians who have been held at Israeli prisons for so-called security reasons and suffer from ailments which they already had when they were arrested or developed later in prison. This also includes prisoners who were shot during their arrest, sustained injuries due to torture, or developed mental illnesses as a result of the harsh prison conditions.*



*'Medical Neglect at Israeli prisons' refers to the process of denying Palestinian political prisoners, arrested for security reasons, access to medical services or delaying offering them such services, which prolongs their suffering, negatively impacts upon their health and sometimes results in their being given the wrong treatment. It has also become evident that Occupation forces have adopted an inhumane policy of not offering prisoners full treatment while at the same time ensuring they don't die in prison, in effect holding these prisoners hostage to a grey area between life and death.*



## 1 Forms of Medical Neglect at Israeli Occupation prisons

Medical neglect assumes many forms at Israeli prisons. Prisoners are not offered monthly medical check-ups, a right guaranteed by international laws which stipulate that all political prisoners undergo regular check-ups especially since many treatments have higher rates of success if diseases are detected during early stages. Many Palestinian prisoners who have lost their lives in Israeli jails have either died or succumbed to treatable illnesses as a result of the failure to offer them regular check-ups.



Article 31 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates “Medical inspections of prisoners of war shall be held at least once a month. They shall include the checking and the recording of the weight of each prisoner of war. Their purpose shall be, in particular, to supervise the general state of health, nutrition and cleanliness of prisoners and to detect contagious diseases, especially tuberculosis, malaria and venereal disease. For this purpose the most efficient methods available shall be employed, e.g. periodic mass miniature radiography for the early detection of tuberculosis.”

Israeli authorities conduct a medical check-up on prisoners upon their arrest and keep records of their ailments and medical conditions. On occasion, Israeli investigators, in coordination with doctors, exploit prisoners' medical histories, and their pain and suffering to put pressure on them during investigations. Some prisoners, especially those who were shot during arrest, have been denied access to medications unless they confessed to certain crimes or provided investigators with information. Human rights activists have previously documented several cases where investigators poked prisoners' wounds to force them to confess during field investigations.

Human Rights Solidary documented the case of Palestinian political prisoner Mohammed Saeed Ahmed Abu Shilbia who was arrested and held at Al-Jalma prison. Abu Shilbia from Nour Ashams refugee camp in Tulkarm suffered from chronic back pain and when he asked investigators to provide him with medication, he was told he would not be given anything unless he made a full confession and disclosed incriminating information about other Palestinians.



Secret documents also revealed that doctors working within Israeli prisons regularly provide Israeli intelligence services “Shabak” with information about prisoners in a clear violation of the principle of doctor-patient confidentiality which applies to everyone, including prisoners. These documents, signed by civilian doctors, contain a summary of the medical condition of political prisoners, their ailments and the medication they receive. According to the documents, two medical forms are usually filled out for each prisoner, one for the file and another, which is to be handed over to investigators. Physicians for Human Rights announced it had sent a letter to the director general at the Israeli ministry of health, Arnon Afek, demanding an explanation regarding the involvement of medical doctors in passing on information to investigators. The Organisation also urged the ministry to take steps to bring those responsible to justice.

Political prisoners who need urgent surgery are forced to wait on the pretext that prison officials have to make arrangements on the basis of a queue system. Some prisoners have had to wait more than two years to have surgery, even those procedures deemed 'urgent' by doctors. Occupation authorities on occasion seek to blame lack of funding for delays in operating on prisoners, especially in cases of major surgeries, whilst at the same time preventing prisoners from having the surgery at their own expense. Foreign and Palestinian volunteer doctors are not allowed to offer their services for free.

Political prisoners are rarely referred to specialists. Despite the fact that most Israeli prisons have their own clinics, physicians are usually General Practitioners, with very little specialisation, working alongside nurses. These clinics rarely have doctors available during



the night in case of an emergency. If a specialist is available at another clinic, prisoners are handcuffed and transferred in a van rather than an equipped ambulance, stopping at various prisons before reaching their destination. Many prisoners have opted to live with the pain rather than endure the arduous journey. On a couple of occasions, prisoners arrived at the other prison only to be told that the doctor or the medical equipment they needed was no longer available.

A former political prisoner who preferred to remain anonymous told the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) that he was severely burnt while making tea at Ofer prison in 2014. The boiling water left him with second-degree burns on his thigh and despite screaming in pain all night, prison officials refused to allow him to go to the clinic on the pretext they could not open the prison gates after the 8p.m roll call. He was not able to see a doctor until the following morning by which time his injuries had worsened considerably.

Even when prisoners are allowed to undergo certain tests (blood or urine tests, MIR, X-ray, biopsies, etc), they are rarely informed of the results.

Israeli prisons also lack medical equipment for prisoners with special needs such as those with prosthetic limbs or suffer from myopia, asthma, bronchitis, etc. Prisoners with certain dietary needs are not offered special meals nor are prisoners with contagious diseases quarantined in special sections ,which often leads to the spread of many viral infections. Mentally ill prisoners are held with the general population and pose a threat to the lives of other prisoners along





with themselves. Prisoners with chronic illnesses are sometimes denied their medication as a form of punishment. Physicians often refrain from examining prisoners directly, choosing instead to look at them from behind bars.

There have been reports of prisoners being used as guinea pigs to test new drugs developed by Israeli pharmaceutical companies. Several prisoners claimed they were asked to take certain drugs without being told what they were for. It was only when the side effects become unbearable were they told to stop taking them. This has prompted many prisoners to opt to live with the pain rather than trust Israeli doctors.

Former Knesset member and president of the Chair of the Knesset Science and Technology Committee, Dalia Itzik, revealed during a Knesset session that Israel had conducted more than a thousand drug experiments on Arab and Palestinian political prisoners. She added that she was in possession of more than 1000 separate ministry of health permits allowing researchers to conduct drug experiments on Palestinian prisoners. The experiments were conducted under controlled environments and followed strict scientific methodologies. According to foreign media, these experiments were carried out on Arab prisoners who had been abandoned by their own so as to ensure that there was little or no risk of being held liable for these illegal tests.

The Russian daily Pravda published a report about Palestinian prisoners in which it referred to the warnings of the International Solidarity Council for human rights that Israel was testing new drugs on Palestinian prisoners in a manner that breaches international law.



## 2 Types of diseases affecting Palestinian prisoners

Palestinian prisoners suffer from a variety of ailments ranging between the mild (skin conditions, the flu, toothaches, haemorrhoids, etc.), moderately serious conditions (hypertension, diabetes, eye problems, ulcers, herniated discs, etc.) and very serious conditions such as various types of cancer, kidney failure, liver cirrhosis, paralysis, and heart conditions.

There are currently 1500 political prisoners who suffer from chronic ailments out of a total of 6500 prisoners. Sixteen of those prisoners are permanently housed at Al-Ramla Prison Hospital because of their acutely serious conditions. Approximately 80 prisoners have



serious chronic conditions in addition to 25 who have cancer and 45 with physical disabilities.

According to recent figures 15% of prisoners suffer from cancer and heart conditions, 14 from stomach-related ailments, 14% from hypertension, 12.7% from chest problems, 11.6 from bone diseases, 8.3% from eye problems, 6.1 % from liver diseases, 5.5% kidney problems, 2.7% from diabetes, and 2.7% from skin problems.

Al-Ramla Prison Hospital, which consists of four damp and badly ventilated rooms, receives prisoners with the most serious of health conditions. At least 15 prisoners are held there permanently, including seven with physical disabilities. Scores of prisoners arrive there from other prisons for medical check-ups or surgeries. It is a well-known fact that Al-Ramla Prison Hospital is not different from any other prison except in name, in that it lacks the facilities needed for the treatment of difficult cases and prisoners with special needs. Some prisoners even said their own prisons were better equipped than Al-Ramla Prison Hospital.

Instances of Medical neglect within Israeli prisons has resulted in the death of 54 Palestinian prisoners. Maisra Abu Hamdia, for example, died of throat cancer at the Soroka Medical Centre, and Hasan Abdulhalim Turabi died from Leukaemia at Afula Hospital. Scores of other prisoners died days or weeks after their releases; Zakaria Issa died from cancer, Zuhair Libbada died of kidney failure, Ashraf Abu Threi' who suffered from physical disabilities, Ja'far Awad who died of pneumonia and Cardiomyopathy.

The number of political prisoners who have died post release raises a number of questions concerning the rapid deterioration of their



health, compounded by the fact that many of them did not suffer from any health problems prior to their arrest. Several Palestinian organisations noted that prison officials might have given these prisoners drugs that may have contributed to the deterioration of their health and eventual demise. They have called for the formation of a fact-finding mission to investigate these deaths.

It is evident that Israeli authorities release sick prisoners only if they are dying. These prisoners, especially the ones serving long prison sentences, are usually examined by two committees; a medical committee to report on the prisoner's health condition and an "Early Release Legal Committee". Prison officials usually agree to release these prisoners, not out of concern for their health, but to protect its reputation abroad and to ward off popular reactions from Palestinians.



## Testimony of released prisoner Mohammed Al-Taj

Mohammed Al-Taj, 45, from Tobas, is another example of the policy of medical neglect adopted by Israeli jail officials. Al-Taj spoke to AOHR UK the day before he was due to fly to India for a lung transplant, “ I was arrested by Israeli occupation forces on 20 November 2003 and sentenced to 12 years in prison. My health was excellent prior to my arrest but a few years into my detention, a special unit tasked with suppressing prisoners raided the room where I was held with 8 other prisoners and fired teargas into the room. I have since suffered from very severe breathing problems. I was taken to a number of Israeli clinics afterwards but they only gave me some painkillers and basic inhalers. The situation persisted for years until I decided to go on an open-ended hunger strike on 15



March 2011 to protest at the lack of medical care. I demanded I be treated as a prisoner of war in accordance with the Geneva Convention, which guarantee my right to receive treatment. On day 52 of the hunger strike, I was transferred to Al-Jalma interrogation centre where I was tortured to force me to end the hunger strike. Prison officials stripped me of all my clothes and placed me in a very tiny cell where I could not tell whether it was day or night. I remained in that cell for 3 days while my health deteriorated. On day 67 of the hunger strike, I was taken to an Israeli hospital as by then my health had deteriorating drastically. A doctor there told me I was suffering from cirrhosis of the lung and required an urgent lung transplant. My health continued to deteriorate until I was released in mid-2013 following a lot of pressure from human rights organisations and also because Israeli authorities did not want to bear the responsibility of my dying in prison.”

Al-Taj pointed out that Israeli intelligence services had total control over all prison clinics and that the doctors present were also army and police officers. He added that these doctors participated in the crackdown on prisoners and carried batons and teargas. He said he saw a doctor attack prisoners at Jalbou' prison on 5 July 2004. Al-Taj noted that Occupation forces, which killed scores of prisoners following their arrest, have no qualms about killing many others in a slow and systematic manner through medical neglect.



## Testimony of released prisoner

### Ghassan Abbas Al-Rimawi

Ghassan Abbas Al-Rimawi, 26, from Beit Rima in Ramallah gave testimony to the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK: “ I was imprisoned between 2005 and 2007. On 16 March 2013, I was arrested again. I did not suffer from any health issues at the time. Two months into my detention I began feeling fatigued most of the time to the extent I could barely stand on my own two legs. I had a fever, lost my appetite and was vomiting constantly. Although I lost more than 10 kilogrammes, prison officials would not allow me to see any doctors outside Ofer prison clinic on the pretext that I was not sick. By that time I could barely sleep and was screaming in pain most of the time. My suffering continued for five months. Seven months into my detention I was released and headed straight to Ramallah hospital where tests revealed that I was suffering from Leukaemia.”



## Political prisoners suffering from Cancer

It is not possible to list the names of all prisoners with medical ailments suffering within Israeli occupation jails. The following is a list of prisoners who suffered various types of cancer and were in a very serious condition. Many are expected to die imminently. The number of prisoners with cancer stands to increase as more prisoners are diagnosed with malignant tumours every day.





## Names of political prisoners who have cancer:

No	Name	Place of Residence	Date of Arrest	Sentence	Type of Cancer
1	Tariq Mahmoud Assi	Nablus	20/07/2005	20 years	Colon Cancer
2	Amer Mohammed Eid Baher	Jerusalem	19/07/2004	12 years	Intestinal Cancer
3	Musa Saeed Soufan	Tulkarm	2002	Life	Head and neck cancer
4	Fawaz Sabi' Bi'ara	Nablus	21/10/2004	Life	Head and neck cancer
5	Naseem Radwan Khattab	Gaza	20/11/2003	12 years	Testicular cancer
6	Mu'tasim Talib Raddad	Tulkarm	12/01/2006	25 years	Stomach cancer
7	Nabeel Na'eem Al-Natsha	Hebron	27/03/2013	Administrative detention	Lymphoma
8	Waleed Wadee' Abu Lihya	Khan Yunis	17/05/2011	5 years	Cancer type not mentioned
9	Yusri Attia Al-Masri	Gaza	09/06/2003	20 years	Thyroid cancer
10	Murad Fahmi Abu Mi'iliq	Gaza	17/06/2001	22 years	Intestinal cancer
11	Mansour Khalil Mawqidda	Salfit	03/07/2002	30 years	Head and neck cancer
12	Naji Jamal Arar	Ramallah	2007	18 years	Head and neck cancer
13	Ali Fahmi Ibrahim Da'na	Jerusalem	16/07/2003	20 years	Intestinal cancer



14	Mahmoud Yusuf Abu Saleh	Hebron	27/07/2002	22 years	Throat cancer
15	Hazim Khalid Miqdad	Gaza	25/02/2011	4.5 years	Liver cancer
16	Khalil Ibrahim Abu Hadroos	Bethlehem	26/01/2012	___	Tumour in the left thigh
17	Nour Mohammed Jaber	Hebron	26/05/2003	17 life sentences	Bone cancer
18	Ibrahim Khalil Al-Bitar	Gaza	07/08/2003	17 years	Leukaemia
19	Abdullah Mahmud Abu Latifah	Bethlehem	2005	15 years	Brain tumour
20	Ra'fat Mohammed Turkman	Jenin	09/02/2003	10 years	Throat cancer
21	Tariq Abdulatif Saba'neh	Jenin	25/06/2012	_____	Testicular cancer
22	Shadi Jazmawi	Tulkarm	21/12/2013	_____	Leukaemia
23	Shadi Fouad Qar'an	Tulkarm	2007	28 years	Testicular cancer
24	Majid Yusuf Jarrar	Tulkarm	2002	30 years	Cancer type was not mentioned
25	Iyas Abid Hamdan Al-Rifa'i	Ramallah	14/08/2006	11 years	Intestinal cancer



## ***Recommendations:***

- 1- The policy of medical neglect adopted by the Israeli Prison Service against Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails shows no sign of abating. Many have died as a result of this policy whilst either still in prison or upon their release. There are no indications that Israel has any intention of changing their policy any time soon.
- 2- The Israeli Prison Service has collaborated with its own doctors to violate the confidentiality of prisoners by utilizing medical information for the purposes of extracting confessions or blackmailing prisoners.
- 3- It is recommended that an international medical fact-finding mission be formed to visit sick prisoners being held within the Israeli prison system on a regular basis to examine their health and to report on the violations perpetrated against them. The committee would also be tasked with presenting proposals about how best to serve the medical needs of these prisoners. A further committee would also be formed to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of prisoners who perished in jail.



- 4- Develop mechanisms that would make it incumbent on the Israeli Prison Service to offer political prisoners, especially those over the age of 40, various medical check-ups on monthly basis and provide them with the appropriate medical treatment required.
- 5- The International community must exert pressure on Israel to force it to comply with international law pertinent to political prisoners in general specifically those whom are ill.