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Webinar: Inhumane Reality for Palestinian Prisoners Inside Israeli Detention Centres

In the wake of the ongoing war that the Israeli occupation launched in Gaza eight months ago, the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) organised a critical webinar on Thursday, 27 June 2024, titled **"Inhumane Reality for Palestinian Prisoners Inside Israeli Detention Centres."** This webinar drew on horrific testimonies from freed prisoners to shed light on the harsh and inhumane conditions faced by Palestinian detainees.

The webinar provided a comprehensive look at the living conditions inside Israeli detention centres, featuring harrowing personal accounts and case studies that highlighted the extent of torture and mistreatment. The discussion explored the long-term psychological and physical effects on the prisoners, examining human rights violations and the role of international organisations in addressing these issues. Participants discussed the necessary actions and measures to mitigate and address these human rights abuses, emphasising the urgency and gravity of the situation.

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The webinar featured a distinguished panel of speakers, including Ken Roth, an American attorney, human rights activist, and writer; Sara Flounders, Co-Director of the International Action Center; Raed Jarrar, Advocacy Director at Democracy for the Arab World Now (DAWN); Emilio Dabed, a lawyer specialising in constitutional matters; Dikran Kaboyan, Chief Editor of Arabic News at Armenpress News Agency; and Katie Halper, an American journalist and writer. These experts brought diverse perspectives and in-depth insights into the dire conditions faced by Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli detention centres.

Ken Roth opened his remarks by addressing a common justification used by supporters of the Israeli government, which is the comparison between their actions in Gaza and those of Hamas. He firmly stated that war crimes committed by one side do not justify war crimes by the other. **Roth** highlighted that despite Hamas' actions on October 7, Israel's disregard for the Geneva Conventions and laws of war is not justified. He emphasised that the presumption of civilian status, a key rule to protect civilians, is often ignored by Israel in its military operations in Gaza.

Roth elaborated on specific instances where Israel's military actions have disregarded civilian status. He pointed out that Israel has destroyed civilian structures such as universities and cultural centres under the guise of targeting

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military targets, amounting to collective punishment. **Roth** also criticised the establishment of "kill zones" where anyone entering is presumed to be a combatant and thus a legitimate target. He condemned the use of artificial intelligence in targeting, where algorithms, often given significant deference, decide who to kill, undermining the requirement for a human decision-maker to ensure the presumption of civilian status.

In his conclusion, **Roth** drew a stark contrast between the treatment of hostages and the overall impact on civilians in Gaza. He recounted incidents such as the bombing of a market during a rescue operation, which resulted in significant civilian casualties. He also underscored the need to hold all parties accountable for their violations of international law and the devastating impact on civilian populations.

Dikran Kaboyan emphasised the humanitarian issue at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, noting the widespread detention and mistreatment of prisoners. He drew parallels between the plight of Palestinian prisoners and the experience of Armenian prisoners held in Azerbaijan, highlighting the broader context of injustice in the Middle East. **Kaboyan** stressed that Israel, as the more powerful side, has no justification for its severe human rights violations against Palestinians.

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Kaboyan criticised Israel's consistent crossing of red lines, as highlighted by the International Court of Justice. He argued that Israel's actions could not be harmonised with international human rights standards and emphasised the importance of respecting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite acknowledging the West's flawed role as a protector of human rights, **Kaboyan** called for reliance on the public opinion in Western countries, which he noted is more developed and aware of human rights issues than in other regions.

In his conclusion, **Kaboyan** expressed pride in the efforts of people worldwide to uphold human rights and called for continued emphasis on universal values. He stressed that international law and relations should reflect the will of the people rather than the politics of individual countries. **Kaboyan** underscored the importance of making human rights principles more reachable and workable for all, urging the international community to hold Israel accountable for its actions and to support the Palestinian struggle for justice and dignity.

Emilio Dabed focused on the experiences and testimonies of Palestinian prisoners, drawing comparisons to historical examples of colonial oppression. He referenced Frantz Fanon's insights on colonial violence, noting that the terror deployed by the Israeli army and settlers is reminiscent of past colonial practices. **Dabed** highlighted the systematic rape, torture, and inhumane

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conditions faced by Palestinian prisoners, which starkly contrast with the treatment of Israeli prisoners, who often return home unscathed and even smiling.

Dabed underscored the psychological impact of colonial accusations, suggesting that the coloniser's accusations against the colonised often reveal their own capabilities and intentions. He cited the disparity between the conditions of Palestinian and Israeli prisoners as evidence of Israel's brutal tactics. **Dabed** noted that Palestinian prisoners return devastated and as shadows of their former selves, illustrating the severe psychological and physical toll of Israeli detention practices.

In his concluding remarks, **Dabed** invoked Primo Levi's reflections on the Holocaust to emphasise the dehumanising conditions faced by Palestinian prisoners. He described Israeli prisons as the "sixth Palestinian geography," a place of suffering that nonetheless fosters solidarity and resistance among prisoners. **Dabed** called for global solidarity with Palestinian prisoners and resistance movements, stressing that understanding and resisting such oppression is crucial for preventing similar atrocities elsewhere. He urged the international community to recognise the shared humanity and resilience of Palestinian prisoners in the face of systemic brutality.

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Katie Halper highlighted the double standards in media and political discourse regarding the treatment of Palestinian and Israeli prisoners. She pointed out that while Israeli politicians and soldiers broadcast their violent actions, the abuse and torture of Palestinians often go unnoticed. **Halper** contrasted the media's portrayal of Israeli hostages, who were treated with care and even allowed to keep pets, with the horrific stories of Palestinian captives facing torture and sexual violence at the hands of Israeli forces.

Halper criticised the Western media's focus on debunked narratives about Hamas using rape as a weapon of war, while largely ignoring the documented sexual violence against Palestinian prisoners. She cited specific instances of brutal torture and abuse, including the use of electric sticks and forced sit-downs on hot metal objects. **Halper** condemned the lack of media coverage and political outrage over these atrocities, attributing it to a systemic refusal to acknowledge the humanity of Palestinians.

In her conclusion, **Halper** noted a shift in public opinion despite the elite's resistance to change. She mentioned resignations from the U.S. State Department in protest of President Biden's support for Israel and growing protests and activism from Jewish organisations and college students. **Halper** emphasised the importance of continuing to raise awareness and hold governments accountable for their complicity in Israel's actions. She highlighted the role of social media and independent reporting in exposing the

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reality of the situation in Gaza and called for sustained efforts to challenge the dominant narratives and advocate for Palestinian rights.

Sara Flounders spoke passionately about the systematic brutality faced by Palestinian prisoners and the complicity of the U.S. in these violations. She emphasised that the terror inflicted on Palestinians is not hidden but rather exhibited as a means of traumatising the population. **Flounders** condemned the use of torture, including rape and electric shocks, as tools to instil a sense of helplessness and total domination. She drew parallels between Israeli and U.S. prison practices, highlighting the training and methods used by U.S. prison guards in places like Abu Ghraib.

Flounders argued that the brutality faced by Palestinian prisoners is part of a broader strategy to harden public opinion and normalise such crimes. She criticised the U.S. corporate media for its silence on these issues while promoting false narratives that serve to justify Israeli actions. **Flounders** acknowledged the immense humanity and resilience of Palestinian resistance, which has refrained from employing similar brutal tactics despite the severe provocations and ongoing violations against them.

In her conclusion, **Flounders** praised the solidarity and support among Palestinian prisoners, noting that their resistance is a form of liberation and a testament to their humanity. She called for recognition and support for

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Palestinian resistance efforts and urged the international community to stand against the occupation and its supporters. **Flounders** stressed that the way to combat the horrors inflicted on Palestinian prisoners is through solidarity, support, and continued resistance, which she described as essential for achieving a liberated and just future.

Raed Jarrar focused on the involvement of the United States in the violations committed by Israel against Palestinians. He emphasised that the U.S. is not merely a passive supporter but an active participant in these crimes due to its financial and political support for Israel. **Jarrar** detailed the significant amounts of military aid provided by the U.S. to Israel, much of which is used to fund the very units committing human rights violations against Palestinians. He highlighted the cash nature of this aid, which effectively subsidises Israeli military operations.

Jarrar called attention to U.S. laws that prohibit funding foreign military units engaged in gross human rights violations yet noted that these laws are routinely ignored when it comes to Israel. He cited specific regulations, such as the Leahy Law, which should prevent U.S. aid to units involved in extrajudicial killings, torture, and other abuses. **Jarrar** argued that the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the documented atrocities committed by Israeli forces should trigger these laws and halt further U.S. funding to Israel.

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In his conclusion, **Jarrar** stressed the need for the U.S. to adhere to its own laws and halt military aid to Israel as long as it continues its violations against Palestinians. He emphasised that the U.S. is complicit in Israel's actions and that holding the U.S. government accountable is crucial for achieving justice. **Jarrar** called for increased advocacy and pressure on the U.S. government to stop funding Israeli military units involved in human rights abuses and to take a more active role in supporting Palestinian rights and ending the occupation.

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