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Webinar Report: Bodies of Detainees and Messages of Torture: What Is Happening Inside Israeli Prisons?

Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) held a [webinar titled “Bodies of Detainees and Messages of Torture: What Is Happening Inside Israeli Prisons?”](#) on Monday, 20 October 2025. The event examined the grave violations committed by Israeli authorities against Palestinian detainees, including physical and psychological torture, sexual violence, and medical neglect, which continue despite the declared ceasefire. It also addressed the return of detainees’ bodies bearing clear signs of abuse and mutilation, the systematic destruction of evidence, and the ongoing impunity that allows these crimes to persist under the guise of security measures.

The webinar brought together a distinguished panel of experts and eyewitnesses: Dr Frank Romano, international human rights activist and member of the July 2025 Gaza Freedom Flotilla (Handhalah); Prof Dan Kovalik, American professor and human rights lawyer; Dr Filiz Değer, Turkish lawyer specialising in international humanitarian law; Sir Geoffrey Nice KC, British barrister and former judge; Dr Ahmed Mokhallalati, Head of Plastic Surgery Department at Al-Shifa Hospital returning from Gaza; Lana Abugharbieh, Palestinian-American nurse returning from Gaza; and Dr Mark Perlmutter, American hand surgeon and human rights advocate.



Dr Filiz Değer highlighted Turkey's humanitarian role after the Gaza ceasefire, noting that Turkish agencies and civil-society groups organised large-scale aid convoys delivering over half a million tonnes of assistance through the Karam Abu Salim crossing. She said Israel had nevertheless continued to violate the truce—closing Rafah, killing dozens of Palestinians, and returning 120 bodies marked with gunshot wounds, blindfolds, and crushed bones, which she described as evidence of torture and collective punishment.

She continued that about 2 000 people had been released from Israeli prisons during the ceasefire, while 11 056 Palestinians remained detained—some 3 500 under administrative detention without trial. Dr Değer added that Gaza's Health Ministry said the remains were tagged as having been held at the Sde Teiman military base in the Negev Desert, a site used as a detention centre where ill-treatment had been documented. She described these findings as evidence of continuing torture, enforced disappearance, and collective punishment under Israel's control, all forming part of a long-term policy to isolate Gaza and maintain separation from the rest of Palestine.

In her legal assessment, she argued that Israel's conduct in Gaza fits within the definition of genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention and constitutes crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute. The deliberate infliction of living conditions leading to destruction—through deprivation of food, water, shelter, and sanitation—amounts, she said, to systematic physical destruction of a people that demands international accountability.

In his contribution, Dr Mark Perlmutter described having taken testimony from doctors, nurses and operating-room technicians who were abducted while they were operating on patients and taken to Israeli prisons where they were tortured. One nurse, he said, was shot in the knee because he refused to abandon a patient mid-operation; that



nurse was then detained, blindfolded, and denied medical care in direct contravention of the Geneva Convention, which Dr Perlmutter noted Israel was a signatory to. The nurse, he reported, received one juice box a day or sometimes every other day, lost 45 pounds, was returned to Khan Yunis with his wound untreated and maggot-infested, and had a rifle butt shoved into his right eye, which exploded; he crawled two kilometres to safety and was eventually found with bed sores on the back of his ears and head. Dr Perlmutter said attempts to save the nurse's leg had failed and the leg was later amputated in Egypt.

He recounted testimony from surgeons who were seized from operating rooms and imprisoned on false claims that they knew the locations of Hamas fighters. In one case, a surgeon was held for eleven months, beaten whenever he asked to speak to a lawyer and beaten three times harder if he was allowed to speak. Every fingertip of that surgeon, Dr Perlmutter said, had been broken and crushed; he had seen X-rays showing each fingertip with unhealed fractures. When the surgeon could not identify any Hamas members because he had never seen anyone he could recognise as such, the sexual and psychological torture escalated. Dr Perlmutter described how the surgeon was raped by female IDF soldiers with a zucchini inserted rectally; the zucchini, he said, had been soaked in pork blood. The interrogators, he reported, showed the surgeon a time-stamped photograph of his wife near their house and threatened to abduct and rape her in front of him; they also showed a drone image of his children's bedroom window and threatened to send a drone through the children's bedroom and incinerate them. Dr Perlmutter emphasised that the mental torture inflicted by those threats far exceeded the physical injuries.

He said he had walked through mass graves and interviewed witnesses who described being forced to bury people alive. Several witnesses, he reported, told him they had seen two children—one wearing bright red and the other a hunter green shirt—pushed by a bulldozer into a mass grave at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital; the witnesses heard their screams as dirt was heaped over them, and later reported that the same



children's skeletons were exhumed still wearing the nylon shirts with their hands tied behind their backs. Dr Perlmutter argued that any government that would selectively assassinate children, bury children alive, torture people sexually, threaten the murders or rapes of relatives, and at the same time present itself as a party to the Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute, demonstrates it has no limit to what it will do. He concluded by stating that this is not a Muslim–Jew conflict but an effort to seize land—“I want your land to create greater Israel and I’m willing to kill your children to get it,” he said—and by condemning, in his words, the American and British legislatures as “prostitutes” for supporting Israel with money and arms, which he said enables the continuation of this genocide. He predicted the ceasefire would prove only a pause, not a lasting end to hostilities, because the terms left the Israeli Army with discretion to determine whether hostilities had ceased.

In his contribution, Dr Ahmed Mokhallalati described the systematic nature of abuses he witnessed under siege and in the aftermath, linking them to the ongoing programme of genocide and systemic torture. He reported that, while at Al-Shifa Hospital, Israeli forces removed more than 250 bodies from that hospital and carried out similar seizures around Nasser Hospital and elsewhere; many other burial sites and collections of bodies were taken without documentation, leaving families without information about thousands of missing dead. He recalled an earlier incident in which the ICRC received a truckload of bodies with no identifying information; the Ministry of Health at first refused to accept them because no data accompanied the remains, but eventually took them because they were Palestinian bodies and they had to be buried without any chance of identification. By contrast, during the fragile ceasefire he said his team had managed to identify about 30 bodies out of more than 150 returned, stressing how limited that progress was compared with the scale of unknown cases.

Dr Mokhallalati set out the severe practical constraints facing Gaza's health and forensic systems. He said the Health Ministry's capacity had collapsed: bodies had been frozen for more than a year, CT scanning was nearly impossible, operating



theatres and laboratory capacity were unavailable, and forensic services lacked DNA equipment and resources to conduct proper examinations. He recounted speaking with the head of forensic medicine, who told him that dozens of bodies showed cuts but the team could not determine whether organs had been removed because of freezing and lack of facilities; the only immediate option was to photograph remains and bury them, with identification sometimes dependent on a family member coming forward. He described prisoner tags and tight blindfolds still present on returned bodies, and said many bodies bore clear signs of trauma—gunshot wounds, crushing injuries and tightly bound ligatures—evidence, he argued, that those responsible had not attempted to conceal mistreatment because they expected no accountability.

Dr Frank Romano described the worsening situation of Palestinian prisoners, noting that their treatment reflects a deliberate policy of dehumanisation and invisibility. Drawing on his own brief imprisonment after joining the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, he said that while international detainees were mistreated, Palestinian prisoners faced far harsher abuse. He referred to testimonies included in B'Tselem's 2024 report **"Welcome to Hell"**, which detailed widespread torture, starvation, sexual assault, and denial of medical care against detainees held without trial. Romano also cited medical evidence from Nasser Hospital showing that many of the recently released Palestinian bodies bore signs of execution—blindfolded, bound, and shot between the eyes—and displayed bruises and scars suggesting torture before and after death.

He then analysed Israel's legal framework that permits such abuses, focusing on amendments to the 2002 *Unlawful Combatants Law*. Romano explained that since October 2023, Israel has used this law to detain thousands of Palestinians indefinitely by classifying them as "unlawful combatants," a category that excludes them from Geneva Convention protections. He criticised the law for allowing 45-day delays before judicial hearings and up to 75 days without access to a lawyer—conditions that he said violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, amounting to arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.



Concluding, Dr Romano argued that Israel's treatment of prisoners, medical neglect, and mass administrative detentions clearly breach international humanitarian law. Gaza, he stressed, remains under full Israeli occupation, making the Geneva Conventions fully applicable. He called on all 194 states party to the Conventions to exercise their legal obligations to prosecute Israeli officials responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

Prof. Dan Kovalik began his intervention by calling the Palestinian issue "the moral issue of our times," expressing deep concern over the ongoing atrocities in occupied Palestine, particularly against detainees. He rejected the term "prisoners," arguing that Palestinians held in Israeli prisons are in fact hostages, no different from the Israeli hostages once held in Gaza, except that they are treated far worse. He stated that since October 7th, the treatment of Palestinians in Israeli custody has deteriorated drastically. According to Kovalik, rape is now being used systematically as a weapon against Palestinian prisoners. He referred to videos showing Israeli guards raping detainees on camera, including the case of Dr Adnan al-Bursh, who he said was "literally raped to death" while in Israeli custody. He added that there are increasing reports of Palestinian detainees being raped by both soldiers and trained dogs.

Kovalik also referenced the recent beating of imprisoned Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti, who was rendered unconscious, saying the assault was part of Israel's strategy to eliminate potential Palestinian leadership.

He further warned that the impunity Israel enjoys encourages these crimes, pointing out that even foreign nationals—including members of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and Western activists like Greta Thunberg—have been mistreated in Israeli prisons. He



cited the arrests of Palestinian-American youths in the West Bank held without charge, noting the U.S. Embassy's silence and failure to intervene. Kovalik condemned the international community's inaction and said that international law alone cannot stop the ongoing crimes. He supported the view of Colombian President Gustavo Petro—whom he described as a personal friend—calling for armed humanitarian intervention under the Uniting for Peace resolution to bypass the UN Security Council and stop Israeli atrocities. He concluded that Israel, backed unconditionally by the United States, has placed itself above international law, and that only decisive international action can end its crimes.

In her detailed testimony, Lana Abugharbieh, a Palestinian-American nurse, one of the world's certified emergency nurses, recounted what she personally witnessed and documented during her missions in Gaza. She explained that she first served there between January 24 and February 24, 2025, alongside Dr Ahmed Mokhallalati, and that she was the only American nurse present on February 27, the day hundreds of Palestinian detainees—torture victims rather than mere prisoners—were released to the European Gaza Hospital. Since October 2023, she said, more than 21,000 Palestinians had been abducted and detained without charge or trial, including around 3,000 children. She described speaking with dozens of the released men on that day, many of whom were too traumatised to speak, trembling, crying, or unable even to lift their heads from humiliation.

Lana shared in painful detail the story of one of her close friends, a Palestinian nurse, who was taken in August 2024 while trying to collect food aid for his starving family from a humanitarian distribution site. Drones had detected his identity through biometrics, and he was seized by an American soldier, beaten, and then handed to Israeli forces who imprisoned and tortured him for two months. For the first 25 days, he was held in solitary confinement and subjected to constant stress positions until, as he told her, it felt like nails were being driven through his legs. When he said this to a soldier, the soldier responded, "Oh, you feel nails in your legs? Let me hammer



them,” and began striking him repeatedly. The nurse was raped with a baton forced into his rectum, his eyelashes were plucked out one by one with tweezers, and electrical probes were placed on his eyelids and the tip of his penis, shocking him at the highest voltage. He was also forced to drink a substance three times daily, which soldiers told him was to sterilise him. Lana said this indicated clinical experimentation on detainees. During his detention, he was starved—given only a few tablespoons of chickpeas or rice mixed with toilet water every other day—and lost ten kilograms in two months. His supposed “crime,” she explained, was that he had allegedly treated Israeli prisoners of war, an accusation unsupported by any evidence or witness. Despite this, he was sentenced to life in prison. Lana said bitterly that “instead of thanking him for treating their people, they sentenced him to life,” adding that he was released only six hours before the bus departed for the ceasefire exchange, his name miraculously appearing on the list.

She said that every released man she spoke to wore identical sweatshirts and wristbands bearing an Arabic phrase meaning, “I pursue my enemies, I catch them, and I do not return until I have destroyed them,” and, as she put it, “Israel fulfilled that promise—they destroyed them physically, mentally, and emotionally.” Many were taken from hospitals, others from their homes or tents under drone surveillance ordering them out with their hands up. As a nurse, Lana said she could treat physical wounds, but not the “distant eyes, the lost looks, the total mistrust in the world,” which were far harder to heal. She insisted that torture, medical neglect, and humiliation are not security measures but crimes, and that medical care is not a privilege—it is a right. She called for more than “thoughts and prayers,” demanding transparency, medical access, international oversight, and decisive global action. “There are no investigations, no emergency resolutions, no outrage from those who claim to stand for human rights,” she said. Concluding her powerful testimony, Lana vowed, “We can’t stay silent. I won’t stay silent. I will not turn away. I will tell their stories over and over and over until the world listens and does something about it.”



In discussing the allegations of organ theft from the bodies of Palestinian detainees, Dr. Mark Perlmutter stated that while he could not personally verify claims of illegal or unethical organ harvesting, he had witnessed unmistakable evidence of brutal war crimes committed by Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians — including both patients and prisoners. His testimony detailed the inhumane treatment and atrocities he had documented, noting that such crimes reflected a complete disregard for international law and human dignity, regardless of whether the specific allegations of organ removal could yet be conclusively proven.

Building on the medical perspective, Dr. Ahmed Mokhallalati, a plastic surgeon returning from Gaza, addressed the issue directly, speaking cautiously about the limits of current forensic capacity in Gaza to establish definitive proof. Nonetheless, he emphasised that the matter must be viewed within the broader context of Israel's long and troubling institutional history. He noted that Israel operates the world's largest human skin bank despite its relatively small population, and that Israeli research institutions and companies have conducted extensive experiments involving human tissue and skin products. He recalled a documented controversy from 2000, when Yehuda Hiss, then head of the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute, admitted to using corpses without family consent — an admission that later forced the Israeli government to pledge compliance with ethical regulations and consent requirements. Dr Mokhallalati emphasised that, although current evidence from Gaza does not yet meet a threshold for definitive claims about organ harvesting, the combination of historical disclosures, the scale of returned bodies bearing prisoner identifiers, and the lack of forensic capacity in Gaza make urgent the need to collect and preserve whatever evidence is available. He called for assistance to the Ministry of Health—DNA machines, forensic support and international pressure on media and donors—to help identify the dead, document abuses, and ensure that future legal processes will have usable evidence.

In this regard, Prof. Dan Kovalik cited an article by Healthcare Workers for Palestine published in Mondoweiss on 22 February 2025, titled “A Brief History of Israel's Organ



Theft and Trafficking of Palestinian Organs.” The article, he said, documents decades of organ theft, with testimonies from relatives of Palestinian prisoners whose loved ones’ bodies were returned missing organs—including eyes—and with admissions by Israeli physicians confirming such acts. He described this as a deliberate crime meant to humiliate Palestinians, noting that for Muslims, receiving a mutilated body violates the sanctity of burial.

From a legal standpoint, Sir Geoffrey Nice KC, a British barrister and former judge, offered a measured view grounded in legal caution. He stressed that while reports of Palestinian bodies being returned without vital organs such as kidneys, livers, and corneas may warrant serious investigation, the available evidence remains insufficient to reach firm conclusions. He underscored that such grave allegations require extensive documentation and forensic proof before being established as fact. At the same time, he raised an alternative hypothesis — that the deliberate return of bodies without organs could be intended to inflict psychological suffering on families as a form of mental torture — though he noted that no evidence currently substantiates this explanation. Sir Geoffrey concluded by thanking the organisers and emphasising the importance of pursuing further research and discussions on the matter with utmost care, objectivity, and legal precision.

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