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Am I Not a Human?

The Suffering of the
Palestinian Prisoners
& Detainees
under the Israeli Occupation



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Chapter 4: Torture

Torture exercised against the prisoners during arrest and interrogation is one of the gravest violations of human rights and one that goes in direct contravention of the international resolutions and agreements. In fact, quite many conventions have confirmed the need to prevent torture of captives, and that it should be criminalized and punished under law, and even those who practice it should be tried, as torture is never justified by “orders.”

However, the public acceptance of the idea of torture in Israel is a crucial cause that boosts the Israeli government’s standing against the anti-torture movements. Torture has gained wide support from public opinion in Israel since the occupation of the GS and WB, as a pretext for defending the security of Israel and its citizens, and fighting “terror.” Further, the Israeli public opinion has hardened between 1993 and 1999, where “Palestinians, Lebanese and other non-Israeli nationals were seen as ‘acceptable’ victims of torture—and the torture methods were





seen as ‘acceptable’ because, among other things, the harshest methods were not used against Israeli Jew.”¹¹⁹

Narrating his painful personal experience of torture in Israeli jails, the prisoner Lou’ai al-Ashqar (28 years) says that “[he] was put on the interrogation chair with [his] back bound to the rear until [his] head reached to the level of [his] feet. The Intelligence agent pressed on [his] chest until in the third time [he] felt that [his] back was broken.” Lou’ai’s feeling did not fail him as he was paralyzed since then. He lost the ability to control the lower part of his body, especially his left leg and the urination process. This was not the end of torture, it was just the beginning. Lou’ai was put in solitary confinement for 21 days while he was unable to move, walk or urinate, and was denied any medical care or even a wheelchair that he could use in his solitary confinement cell.¹²⁰

In November 2001, the UN Committee against Torture reminded Israel that torture could never be justified,¹²¹ since it is a clear violation of Articles 31, 32, 146 and 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Nevertheless, Israel remains adamant about developing its own rules whether through certain practices or through the specific laws that legalize torture and foster blatant discrimination against Palestinian captives, including those holding Israeli identity cards and who are supposed to be “Israeli citizens.”

It goes without saying that the Israeli security authorities have been practicing systematized, continuous torture against the prisoners since the occupation of the WB and the GS. Those authorities have used torture to force the prisoners to confess and to put pressure on them during interrogation, which makes torture a subject for the permanent complaints of human rights organizations which have been trying to push Israel to change its policy of repression and torture, yet to no avail.





The situation got even worse when torture was legalized after the “Landau Commission,” chaired by Moshe Landau the former chief of the Supreme Court of Israel, has legalized torture in 1987, declaring that “the prevailing view is that recourse to some measure of physical pressure in the interrogation of HTA [hostile terrorist activity] suspects is unavoidable.” The Landau Commission recommended that the GSS should be authorized to use psychological pressure and “a moderate measure of physical pressure” in their interrogation of “security” detainees. The Commission relied on the concept of “the lesser evil” in stating that “actual torture... would perhaps be justified in order to uncover a bomb about to explode in a building full of people”. Although the report stated that “the pressure must not reach the level of physical torture or maltreatment of the suspect or grievous harm to his honour which deprives him of his human dignity”, the image of the “ticking bomb” was used repeatedly by the Israeli authorities to justify methods which constituted torture.¹²²

The decision of Landau Commission has marked the beginning of a package of military orders that allowed torture of the prisoners, especially in the period 1993–1999. Those decisions, along with the Israeli public wide approval, caused an increase in the prevalence of torture in Israeli prisons in the above-mentioned period. Facing this widespread use of torture, the anti-government movements intensified their objection to Israeli repressive practices, both locally and internationally.¹²³ These movements urged the Israeli Supreme Court to issue, in September 1999, a verdict that considered some methods of interrogation as illegal and unacceptable. Yet, despite this verdict, most indicators show that resort to torture has never stopped.





Excerpts from the Testimonies of Some Prisoners

Barking Like Dogs

The interrogators completely shaved his head so that no one could know how much hair they plucked with their hands. They used him for their entertainment where they tied a rope to his pants as a tail, and they forced him to crawl on his limbs and to bark like dogs, before throwing him some pieces of bread.

Hitting the Genitals

One prisoner was interrogated by an interrogator called Javil who beat him with a truncheon and hung him to the ceiling. He also beat him on his genitals. This prisoner says, "I passed out and when I recovered all my body was wet. They took me to a room, sat me on a chair and trod on my chains."

Burning Matches

A prisoner said, "They used an electric current and hit me with clubs. They kept approaching burning matches to my lips."

➤ *Al-Hayat al Jadidah*, 12/6/2008.

Branding with Fire

An Israeli interrogator called Ibrez had the sole role of beating the prisoners. As per the testimony of a former prisoner, Ibrez had threatened him to get his mother and sister and rape them in front of him...He adds, "That night, the interrogators dictated me a letter which looked like I was going to commit suicide. The letter was addressed to my wife. Then, they put me in a car, and on the way they kept cudgeling me until we reached at a military camp. They admitted me into a cell, beat me on my stomach, branded me with fire and stroke me on my head till I fell to my feet. I said I would sign to anything. I could not take it anymore."

Inserting a Snowball into the Anus

One prisoner said he was beaten with a ruler that had nails fixed on it. He also added that the interrogator punched him on his eye, and inserted a snowball into his anus.



Prostitutes' Rooms

One female prisoner said, "After my arrest, I was brought into a room of detained prostitutes who attacked me and hit me harshly until I passed out. They tore my clothes in front of the policemen and left me naked. I was then pregnant in my second month and I started to bleed. I asked for a doctor. The interrogators said: when you speak, the doctor should come."

➤ *Al-Hayat al Jadidah*, 12/6/2008.

Inserting a Bullet into the Anus

One of the prisoners' lawyers said that his client "was subjected to harsh torture which caused physical and mental harm. He fainted and had a mind disorder. Until now, he has not returned to his full strength. The prisoner was branded with burning cigarettes. A bullet was inserted into his anus. It all happened in al-Maskubiyyah camp."

Upon my arrest, I was beaten and cudged all over my body with the butts of guns, clubs, hands and legs while I was handcuffed and blindfolded... The soldiers used diverse methods to torture me... They used to retreat then jump on my stomach... Many soldiers extinguished cigarette butts on my body especially on my back, hands and legs... I was placed very close to a huge, high sounding stereo... I could not tolerate the sound so I got very dizzy. The soldiers began to sing and dance while they beat me all over my body. They forced me to stand on my tip toes where one of them would act as Rambo and hit me with his boots on the lower part of my leg till I fell. The soldiers would then hit me harshly... Then, they would drag me on the floor for a distance, which caused bruises and injuries all over my body. During interrogation in Maskubiyyah Prison, an interrogator named Shadi pressed on my throat with his thumb and he asked me to choose between confession and death.

The prisoner Khalil 'Abdel Ghani Qattash

➤ Palestinian Prisoners Club report no. 262/2005, 20/7/2005, www.ppsmo.org





According to a report by the Palestinian Prisoners Club in 2003, “there was degeneration in the moral level of the behavior of the Israeli army, prisons’ administrations and interrogators against the Palestinian prisoners.” Appallingly, the report added that “95% of the detained prisoners were tortured by internationally prohibited means.”¹²⁴

A statistical report by the specialized researcher in the issue of Palestinians prisoners ‘Abdul Nasser Farwana listed the most significant forms of “routine” torture. According to the report that is dated 25/6/2009, 92% of the prisoners are beaten, 45% are put in special freezers in winter, while 75% are subjected to *shabeh*, a form of strappado or position abuse. This is in addition to forcing around 94% to stand for a long period that could reach several days.¹²⁵

A joint study issued in May 2007 by The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B’Tselem) and HaMoked-Center for the Defence of the Individual, affirmed that:

In recent years, Israel has officially admitted several times that in “ticking-bomb” cases, the interrogators of the Israel Security Agency (ISA, formerly referred to as the GSS – General Security Service) employ “exceptional” methods of questioning, including “physical pressure.”¹²⁶

Moreover, the Israeli daily *Maariv* reported in July 2004, as a part of an interview with three officers of the ISA, that the Israeli ISA uses “all possible manual methods from brutal shaking and dragging to beating up.”¹²⁷ This was, and is still, confirmed by dozens and even hundreds of statements and confessions made by Palestinians who were subjected to captivity or interrogation.



The appalling occupation practices have exceeded physical torture to direct humiliation against Palestinian prisoners and their dignity; starting from screaming and spitting to verbal abuse the threat to rape the wife, the mother or the daughter, to the naked inspection and sexual assault. The following are two testimonies on examples of such practices; the first comes from the prisoner Maha ‘Awwad:

When I arrived at Huwara Detention Center, one of the soldiers kicked me and blood gushed out of my mouth. Another soldier threatened to rape me... The cell where I was detained seemed to be abandoned, the mattress was dirty and damp, and there was no water... when I asked for some water, one soldier urinated into a bottle and offered me to drink.¹²⁸

The other testimony is by the prisoner Yasir al-Deesy, who says:

When I could move the fold off my eyes, I could barely see that I was in a school room. From the window, I could see the Agricultural Relief facility, so I could locate the place: it was a high school that the Israelis have occupied and transformed into a center for the army and its vehicles... The soldiers refused to untie the prisoners’ chains so that they could go to the toilet. Instead, they untied one prisoner and entrusted him with the task on behalf of the other prisoners. He had to unzip all their trousers, and even more, until all the prisoners were done... We were around 100 prisoners and anyone who uttered a word was beaten.¹²⁹





Legal reports have pointed to a set of procedures that comprises a violation of the dignity of Palestinian prisoners. Most prisoners who were detained during *al-Aqsa Intifadah* between 2000 and 2007 have made living testimonies to human rights organizations about the insults they had to face during arrest and before interrogation, as well as the different torture methods which the Israeli authorities had employed against them. The following are the most prominent torture methods:

1. Sexual harassment and the threat of rape.
2. Severe beating with hands, feet and rifle butts.
3. Using the detainees as human shields.
4. Forcing them to strip naked.
5. Forcing them to mimic animal voices and movements as a form of humiliation.
6. Forcing them to stand in the open air in summer and winter for long hours.
7. Stamping on them after their arrest.
8. Obscene and degrading insults.¹³⁰
9. Exposing them to severe shaking.
10. Being forced to sit or stand in the *shabeh* position; being forced to squat on the tips of the toes (the “frog crouch”).
11. Excessive tightening of handcuffs.
12. Deprivation of sleep for long periods of time.
13. Covering the head with a hood.
14. Forcing them to listen to extremely loud music.¹³¹
15. Subjecting captives to psychological pressure, by making them believe that they are allowed to speak to a lawyer, then preventing the lawyer from meeting with his client for security reasons.



16. Planting undercover agents in detention rooms and blackmailing the prisoners through different methods, in the so-called “birds rooms.”
17. Extinguishing cigarettes on their bodies.¹³²
18. Preventing the use of the bathroom for long periods of time.
19. The threat to pass military resolutions authorizing the torture of the detainee to death or the demolition of the family house among other means of threat,¹³³ as a form of psychological pressure on the detainee.
20. Exposing the prisoner to electric shocks until loss of consciousness.¹³⁴

The aforementioned methods are only a part of what the captives face in the horrible Israeli prisons. All the examples are based on the testimonies of



A picture of the prisoner As‘ad al-Shawwa who was murdered in captivity on 16/8/1988, after the commander of the detention camp (Ansar three, Negev) had shot him with live bullets from a

short distance during his participation in a protest organized by the prisoners to object to the conditions of detention. The prisoner Bassam al-Smoudi was murdered with As‘ad. Despite the killing of 80 captives in the period between 1967 and 1988 (the number of murders of the prisoners is well above 190 Palestinians), the murder, of As‘ad al-Shawwa and Bassam al-Smoudi remains the most prominent, and it is considered a precedent in terms of the way of killing as it was the first time when captives would die after being shot with live bullets.

This incident coincided with the presence of the representative of the ICRC who was visiting the camp at the time, and saw everything yet did nothing!

➤ Quds net News Agency, 16/8/2007.





the prisoners and on the international reports, which always bring news of the latest “styles” pursued in the torture and humiliation of the prisoners. According to a report prepared by B’Tselem in June 1998, “the Shabak investigators use more than 105 methods to torture Palestinian prisoners during investigation and interrogation.”¹³⁵ Statistics indicate that 139 Palestinian prisoners died under torture or as a result of direct killing. The last one among those until the preparation of this study, was the prisoner Fawwaz Freihat who was shot after his arrest, on 7/1/2008.¹³⁶



The Oldest... the Youngest... and the Longest

*Israel Refuses to Release the **Senior** Palestinian Prisoner Who Has Exceeded 80*



...The aged prisoner Sami Yunus has exceeded 80 years and has spent the last 26 years in prison. He suffers serious health conditions where he had a heart attack and underwent an operation to remove a tumor from his intestines besides inflammations in his joints, ears and eyes... Although the General Security Service (Shin Bet) agreed on his release when he would reach 70 years of age, the Israeli authorities still refuse to release him.

➤ *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 7/6/2008.

*The **Youngest** Captive in the World... a Forty-Day-Old Suckling*



The suckling Yusuf al-Ziq (40 days)... The baby prisoner was born 40 days ago to his mother the captive Fatima al-Ziq—42 years from al-Shuja'iyya, Gaza... In addition to the baby prisoner Yusuf al-Ziq, there is Ghada Abu Omar, a female baby prisoner aged seven years and seven months and daughter of the female prisoner Khawla Zeetawi who is sentenced to two years.

➤ *Albayan* newspaper, Dubai, 17/3/2008.

*The **Longest** Engagement in History... Marriage with a Stay of Execution for Life Prisoners Nizar and Ahlam al-Tamimi*



The prisoners Nizar al-Tamimi (99 years imprisonment, completed 15 years as of April 2008) and his fiancée Ahlam al-Tamimi (16 verdicts of life imprisonment, an equivalent of 1,584 years, completed 7 years up until now) continue to count the days and years awaiting the moment that would bring them together, especially that their engagement seems to be heading to the unknown amidst the fears of their families that it would be the longest engagement in history when nothing is clear regarding the release of the prisoners. (The engagement ceremony was held in their village on 19/5/2005 and sweets were served... in the presence of the families and the absence of the betrothed).

➤ *Al-Khaleej*, 18/4/2008







*The Suffering of the
Palestinian Prisoners
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under the Israeli Occupation*
معاناة الأسير الفلسطيني
تحت الاحتلال الإسرائيلي

This Book

The Palestinian prisoners and detainees in the prisons of the Israeli occupation are being tortured and detained for months and years. Their families are being exhausted with waiting and longing for their loved ones. Their stories are live testimonies to the cruelty and inhumanity of the occupation. Palestinian prisoners are the real proof of the patience, steadfastness, bravery and pride of the Palestinian people.

This book, the fourth of its series, is based on the available data, such as Palestinian, Arab and International reports and information, in addition to the testimonies by the prisoners themselves. Al-Zaytouna Centre endeavors to present to its readers the full and complete picture of the suffering of the Palestinians under the Israeli occupation. It tries its best to address the hearts and minds with the most accurate, concrete and documented information.



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