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By Sharen Green

A TEENAGER tells me how he's hoping to study journalism when he graduates from secondary school next year. But his chances have not been improved by a three-month prison sentence imposed on him this year.

Until his recent release he was one of the 420 Palestinian young prisoners detained illegally in Israel. His crime was stone-throwing though there's no evidence that anyone was hurt or anything was damaged.

In fact there is very little evidence at all – only his confession which, according to a human rights organisation, may itself be highly suspect.

On February 18 the budding reporter – let's call him Khaled – was one of about 80 youths rounded up by Israeli soldiers and police in the West Bank village of Jayyous in the middle of the night. Most were released within hours but a handful were taken to Israel. Khaled, 17, was sentenced to jail and fined 500 shekels – about £80.

Stone-throwing could be described as the most popular sport in Jayyous where I'm serving as a human rights monitor under a World Council of Churches programme. The Separation Barrier penetrates 6.5 kilometres inside Palestinian territory here, isolating 75 per cent of the land and all the water sources bar one from the village.

The fence is fitted with electronic sensors and on a Friday youths often throw stones at it, sparking a visit from the Israeli Defence Forces, in turn prompting pitched battles, curfews and arrests.

Though Khaled speaks to me through an interpreter, his mother's English is effective as they tell me about the beatings suffered by both the boy and his father.

"They came at 2am and make a big mess," she said.

"They held him (her husband) on the ground. They beat him, banging his head against the wall because he didn't allow them to search.

"'You don't have the right to search' he told them.

"There were 14 soldiers banging on the door with their guns. They took his small brothers and put them in one room."

Khaled tells of his interrogation, an attempt to make him turn collaborator and he says he was terrorised with dogs and water hoses whilst in prison.

He was removed to Megiddo prison in Israel, even though such transfers of prisoners are illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

I visit Addameer, a Palestinian NGO in Ramallah which supports the rights of prisoners because I want to check out the story with Khaled's advocate Mahmoud Hassan.

According to testimony which Mr Hassan translated for me, the boy had been threatened that he would be kept in prison for his whole life and that his parents would not be allowed into Israel to visit him unless he signed a confession.

He refused and was kept blindfolded with his wrists handcuffed behind his back outside in the cold all night. The testimony also stated that he had not been allowed to drink or use a lavatory and that anyone who moved was beaten. In the morning he signed the confession.

The testimony made reference to the beating of his father but did not mention the dogs, water hoses or bribes to collaborate. Mr Hassan said detainees often didn't tell their lawyers the whole story because they were not allowed private interviews.

Khaled was not granted bail while he waited for his case to come to court. Mr Hassan called the treatment "savage" and the punishment "very harsh".

He explained that the lawyers often settle for a three-month sentence just to get the children released.

"He will wait for his trial several months, maybe two years or more," he said.

He criticised the way confessions were obtained and pointed out that the Israeli treatment of the child falls short of international standards - Israelis are considered adults at 18 but Palestinians from the Occupied Territories are deemed adult at 16 and are not separated from other prisoners.

Meanwhile Khaled has decided he will not go on any more demonstrations.
