

Palestinian Hunger Strikes: Get the Facts



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What is the History of Palestinian Hunger Strikes? Hunger strikes have long been used in different geographical areas as means to protest and demand basic rights, including the right to vote, the right to be free from torture and the right to self-determination. The long history of Palestinian prisoners in mass and individual hunger strikes, reveals the lack of trust in any judicial process and the lack of fair trial guarantees they face under the military and civil court systems of the Israeli occupation. [Palestinian prisoners and detainees have resorted to hunger strikes as early as 1968](#) as legitimate peaceful protest to Israeli detention policies and cruel detention conditions including the use of solitary confinement, denial of family visits, inadequate medical treatment and torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

What are the Medical Risks of Hunger Strikes? Hunger strikes have associated health risks that can cause physical damage to the prisoner or detainee, including severe loss of weight, weakness, tiredness, inability to sleep, hearing loss, blindness, strokes, kidney failure as well as other organ

failure, cardiac arrest and heart attack. However, despite these medical risks, through hunger strikes, Palestinians have been able to obtain basic and fundamental rights and to improve their detention conditions through hunger strikes.

How do Israeli Authorities Deal with Hunger Strikes? Hunger strikes are often met with violent and [coercive repression by Israeli Prison Service and special units](#), as well as medical personnel to push detainees to end their hunger strikes. Following hunger strikes, Addameer has documented several cases of raids on prison cells, transfers of hunger strikers to isolation cells, threats of indefinite detention, banning family visitation, reduction of money spent in the canteen.

What Other Coercive Measures were Taken? In response to the use of hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners and detainees, Israeli authorities practiced force-feeding during the 1980s. It was subsequently ceased by order from the Israeli High Court following several deaths of Palestinian prisoners resulting from force-feeding. At the time of earlier hunger strikes, Israel practiced force-feeding of hunger-strikers in order to coerce detainees to end to their hunger strikes without any legislation to regulate this measure. [Several Palestinian prisoners have died as a result of being subjected to force-feeding](#). These include Abdul-Qader Abu al-Fahm who had died on 11 May 1970 during a hunger strike in Ashkelon prison, Rasem Halawah and Ali al-Ja'fari, who died following the insertion of the feeding tubes into their lungs instead of their stomachs in July 1980 during a hunger strike in Nafha prison, and Ishaq Maragha, who died in Beersheba prison in 1983. Recently, [a proposal for a legislation](#) by the Israeli minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan was initiated in response to the mass hunger strike of 2012 with the purpose of putting an end to future hunger-strikes and depriving Palestinian detainees and prisoners from their fundamental right to peaceful protest. The bill was approved by the Israeli Knesset on the 30th of July 2015.

Since when have Hunger Strikes been used in Protest of Administrative Detention? At least since the 1990s, Palestinian prisoners have resorted to hunger strikes as means to protest Israeli arbitrary use of administrative detention. Administrative detention is a procedure that allows the Israeli military to hold prisoners indefinitely on **secret information without charging them or allowing them to stand trial**. There are an estimated 750 Palestinians placed under administrative detention, including women, children, and Palestinian Legislative Council members.

In recent years, Palestinian prisoners and detainees have resorted to hunger strike to protest and increasing and systematic use of administrative detention by the occupation authorities. For example, [in 2012, Palestinian prisoners and detainees declared a mass hunger strike](#), which involved nearly 2000 hunger strikers demanding the end of administrative detention, denial of family visitations to Gaza prisoners, isolation and other punitive measures. The 2012 hunger strike ended with Israel's temporality limiting the use of administrative detention. However, few years later, the occupation authorities increased the use of administrative detention leading to another hunger strike [in 2014 by over 80 administrative detainees asking for an end to the use of the arbitrary policy](#). The hunger strike ended after 63 days without forcing the Israeli government to limit the use of administrative detention.

Additionally, several Palestinian administrative detainees embarked on individual hunger strikes in protest of replacing them under administrative detention without charge or trial of several times. These individual hunger strikes included [Mohammad Al-Qeeq](#), Khader Adnan, Hana Shalabi, Thaer Halahleh and Bilal Diab. Most recently, Bilal Kayed, who is on his 50th day of hunger strike is also protesting his administrative detention. An administrative detention order was issued against him on the day of his scheduled release after having spent 14 years and a half serving a prison sentence. Currently, [over 100 Palestinian prisoners and detainees have joined Bilal in solidarity protests of hunger strike](#) to put an end to the systematic and widespread use of administrative detention.

Why do Palestinians Resort to Hunger Strikes? Palestinian prisoners and detainees resort to hunger strike in order to protest and have their voices heard outside an unfair legal system which administers their arbitrary detention and the repression of their voices (through administrative detention orders without trial and legislation including the recent force-feeding bill). However, Israeli occupation authorities have not managed to break the will of Palestinian hunger strikers who continue to use their bodies, in the absence of any adequate judicial remedies, to practice legitimate disobedience. Hunger strikers defy disciplinary power of control and domination; the body of the hunger striker thereby constitutes a medium through which power is shifted and recreated. The prisoners and detainees refuse to comply with the prison's structured system of constrain and privation where they do not have full autonomy over their bodies. Thus, through hunger strikes, these prisoners and detainees re-gain sovereignty over their bodies through becoming decision makers over the prison authorities.

What Are Our Demands? Addameer calls upon the international community to demand that the Israeli government to respect the will of hunger strikers who use their bodies as a legitimate means of protest, which has been recognized by the World Medical Association (WMA) Declaration of Malta on Hunger Strikes as "[often a form of protest by people who lack other ways of making their demands known](#)." Addameer also calls upon the international community to stop the use of administrative detention as recommended by the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT), in its [concluding observations](#) on 13 May 2016, which called on the Israeli government to "[t]ake the measures necessary to end the practice of administrative detention and ensure that all persons who are currently held in administrative detention are afforded all basic legal safeguards." Addameer further demands the international community, including the European Union, the United Nations, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, to intervene immediately to save the lives of Bilal Kayed and other hunger striking prisoners, some of whom are in critical medical conditions.
