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[Home](#) > Addameer and Al-Haq Send Appeal to UN Special Procedures on the Situation of Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Prisons amidst Concerns over COVID-19 Exposure

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01 April 2020

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Date: 1 April 2020

On 1 April 2020, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association and Al-Haq sent a joint urgent appeal to the United Nations (UN) Special Procedures regarding the rapidly deteriorating condition of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons in light of the continued spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Palestine and around the world. Addressed to five Special Procedures mandates, including the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, the organisations urgently requested intervention to uphold the right to health, safety, and well-being of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention, particularly as many are minors, chronically ill, vulnerable groups, or held under administrative detention in contravention of international law.

In early March 2020, the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) halted all family and lawyers' visits for prisoners, citing this measure as a COVID-19 precaution. Furthermore, Palestinian prisoners face dismal detention conditions in Israeli prisons, including overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, lack of proper ventilation, and poor nutrition. These make Israeli prisons dangerous breeding grounds for a COVID-19 outbreak and compound the vulnerability of Palestinian prisoners. In particular, IPS officers are not taking necessary precautions, as they continue to conduct daily searches and prisoner counts without

wearing hazmat suits, protective gloves, or face masks.

Around the world, UN experts have highlighted the need to ensure the release of political prisoners as well as other detainees in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 25 March 2020, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, stated: “[n]ow, more than ever, governments should release every person detained without sufficient legal basis, including political prisoners and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views.”^[1] Accordingly, Addameer and Al-Haq urged the UN Special Procedures to intervene to guarantee the health and safety of Palestinian prisoners during the pandemic, and to:

- i. Call on Israel, the occupying power, to release all Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli prisons to ensure their safety from an uncontrolled COVID-19 spread, particularly those who are more vulnerable and more susceptible to the disease, including children, women, older persons, prisoners with underlying health conditions, and injured prisoners;
- ii. Further demand the release of all Palestinian political prisoners under administrative detention, who are detained indefinitely without charge or trial, in contravention of international law, and urge the release of all Palestinian political prisoners who are nearing the end of their sentences and/or should be released on probation, to reduce overcrowding in Israeli prisons;
- iii. Call on IPS to ensure the protection of all prisoners and uphold their right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination, by adopting the latest WHO guidance on preventing COVID-19 outbreak in prisons,^[2] and taking the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic in Israeli prisons; and
- iv. Urge IPS to install landlines in Israeli prisons and ensure the maintenance of family contacts for Palestinian prisoners through unmonitored phone or video calls between the prisoners and their families, especially while family visits continue to be suspended.

To read the urgent appeal sent by Addameer and Al-Haq to the UN Special Procedures on 1 April 2020, see [here](#).

^[1] OHCHR, “Urgent action needed to prevent COVID-19 ‘rampaging through places of detention’ - Bachelet,” 25 March 2020, available at:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25745&LangID=E>.

^[2] WHO, “Preventing COVID-19 outbreak in prisons: a challenging but essential task for authorities,” 23 March 2020, available at:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/prisons-and-health/news/news/2020/3/preventing-covid-19-outbreak-in-prisons-a-challenging-but-essential-task-for-authorities>.
