



Published on Addameer (<http://www.addameer.org>)

[Home](#) > Addameer's Statement on World Health Day

Addameer's Statement on World Health Day



07 April 2020

Today, on World Health Day we uplift and extend gratitude to all the medical workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those in Palestine working with limited resources. However, we also must draw attention to how medical negligence is used systematically and deliberately by the Israel Prison Service (IPS) against Palestinian prisoners. It is one of the main violations of prisoners' rights by the occupation authorities.

On this World Health Day, there are around 5000 Palestinian prisoners including, 180 children, 41 women and 430 administrative detainees. This number also includes around 700 sick and/or injured prisoners among them are 200 prisoners who have chronic diseases.

Our growing concern for Palestinian prisoners and detainees during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic grows out of the systematic and routine medical negligence inside Israeli detention and interrogation centers. In 2019, a total of five Palestinian prisoners died, three of them as a result of deliberate medical negligence, while hundreds suffer from chronic diseases that go untreated. Furthermore, the dismal conditions of detention have a very important impact on the health of prisoners, and are part of this ongoing discriminatory policy of medical negligence. These detention conditions include insects, humidity, lack of proper ventilation, overcrowding, lack of measures to ensure public and personal hygiene, and lack of proper needed nutrition, which all make Israeli prisons dangerous breeding grounds for COVID-19 and compound the vulnerability of Palestinian prisoners.

These make Israeli prisons dangerous breeding grounds for COVID-19 and compound the vulnerability of Palestinian prisoners. In particular, prisoners have reported that IPS has imposed new restrictions on purchases from the prison canteen, and that they are not provided with proper hygiene and sanitary products, putting them even further at risk of an uncontrolled spread. The IPS officers are not taking any precautions, as they still conduct the daily searches and daily count of prisoners, which are in total five a day, conducted by officers who are not wearing hazmat suits, protective gloves, or medical face masks. Furthermore, just last week on 31 March 2020, Palestinian prisoner Nour al-Deen Sarsour was released from Ofer prison, and one day after his release he tested positive for the corona-virus. Later nine prisoners were transferred from Ofer to isolation at Ayala prison, in what is supposed to be quarantine. The nine prisoners were not yet tested for the corona-virus, in fact, the medical tests made for them are limited to taking their temperature. One of those prisoners was Qais Daraghmeh, who was sentenced on 5 April 2020 and released on that same day. Qais was put in quarantine twice in one month, the first was in mid-march after direct interaction with an officer at Petah Tikva who also tested positive for the corona-virus.

Despite a multitude of guidelines and recommendations issued by the World Health Organization (WHO),^[1] the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),^[2] and human rights experts, on the need to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the context of detention,^[3] conditions in Israeli prisons continue to deteriorate. On 30 March 2020, the UN Subcommittee for the Prevention of Tortured (SPT) called on Governments to take measures to protect individuals deprived of their liberty during the pandemic, and to consider “reducing prison populations by implementing schemes of early, provisional or temporary release of low-risk offenders, reviewing all cases of pre-trial detention, extending the use of bail for all but the most serious cases, as well as reviewing and reducing the use of immigration detention and closed refugee camps. The advice also emphasizes that all detainees, people in quarantine and closed medical settings, their families, and all staff, should receive reliable, accurate and the latest information concerning all adopted measures.”^[4]

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. In the case of Iran, following a decision taken on 9 March to release 70,000 prisoners none of whom were political detainees, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran was able to secure the additional release of political prisoners.^[5] 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.”^[6]

In light of the above, and to guarantee the health and safety of Palestinian prisoners during the COVID-19 pandemic, Addameer calls for:

- i. The release of all Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli prisons to ensure their safety from an uncontrolled spread of the pandemic, particularly those who are more vulnerable and more susceptible to the disease, including children, female prisoners, older persons, prisoners with underlying health conditions, and the injured;
- ii. Demand, in particular, the release of all Palestinian political prisoners under Israeli 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 prisons;
- iii. Call on IPS to ensure the protection of all prisoners without discrimination by adopting the WHO’s recent guidance on Preventing COVID-19 outbreak in prisons,^[7] and taking necessary preventive measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic in Israeli prisons.
- iv. Urge IPS to install landlines in the prisons and otherwise maintain Palestinian prisoners’ connection

with their families through unmonitored phone or video calls between the prisoners and their families, especially as family visits are suspended.

[1] 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>. See also IASC, "IASC Interim Guidance on COVID-19: Focus on Persons Deprived of Their Liberty (developed by OHCHR and WHO)," 27 March 2020, available at: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/other/iasc-interim-guidance-covid-19-focus-persons-deprived-their-liberty-developed-ohchr-and-who>.

[2] 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>.

[3] See, e.g., OHCHR, "COVID-19: Who is protecting the people with disabilities? – UN rights expert," 17 March 2020, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25725&LangID=E>.

[4] OHCHR, "COVID-19: Measures needed to protect people deprived of liberty, UN torture prevention body says," 30 March 2020, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25756>.

[5] Parisa Hafezi, "Iran temporarily frees 85,000 from jail including political prisoners," Reuters, 17 March 2020, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-iran-prisoners/iran-temporarily-frees-85000-from-jail-including-political-prisoners-idUSKBN21410M>. See also OHCHR, "Human rights experts call for immediate release of political prisoners and detainees in Yemen given risk of spread of COVID-19," 30 March 2020, available at: <https://ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=25759&LangID=E>.

[6] See *supra* note 3.

[7] See *supra* note 1.
