Briefing on the Situation of Palestinian Political Detainees in 2001

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September 20th marked 25 years since the arrest and detention of Palestinian political prisoner Ahmed Jabara Abu Sukr. Abu Sukr was arrested on 20 September 1976 and after spending 153 days in interrogation he was convicted on the basis of evidence obtained from a collaborator. He is currently incarcerated in Askelan Prison and is the longest serving Palestinian political prisoner currently in an Israeli jail.

There are approximately 100 Palestinians currently in interrogation, distributed throughout the following detention centres: the Russian Compound, Jalami, Petah Tikva, Beit El, Askelan and Etzion. The distribution of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons is as follows: Askelan Prison, 424; Nafah, 222; Kufr Yuna, 3; Haddareem, 80; Shatta, 130; Megiddo, 850; and 11 female prisoners in Ramle Prison.

Twenty-five years after Abu Sukr’s arrest, Israeli authorities continue to use the same methods of torture and maltreatment in order to pressure detainees during interrogation. These methods include:

- Tying detainees in painful positions for extended periods of time. The most notorious of these positions is Shabeh, in which the detainee is tied to a chair in a contorted position for long hours.
- Depriving the detainee from lawyer visits for periods that may extend to 30 continuous days. The aim of this practice is to isolate the detainee and increase the psychological pressure on them. In many cases the lawyer is not informed of the prisoner’s whereabouts. Moreover, family visits and phone calls are also prevented with the aim of increasing the sense of isolation felt by the detainee while under interrogation.
- Using “collaborators” in order to extract a confession. This practice is commonly used in the process of interrogation and involves placing the detainee in a cell with Palestinians who work with the Israeli authorities. The detainee is often under the illusion that they have finished interrogation and have been moved to a standard prison. After the intense isolation of interrogation the detainee welcomes human contact and the collaborators attempt to capitalize on this feeling in order to extract a confession from the detainee. If the detainee is not forthcoming with information, physical pressure or death threats are often used by the collaborators to force the detainee to confess.

Banning of family visits

The last 12 months has seen an unprecedented closure on the Palestinian Occupied Territories making family visits to Palestinian detainees almost impossible. Families are forced to obtain a special permit in order to visit their relatives in prison. These permits are extremely restrictive and visits are often cancelled because of the closure. Families are forced to wait long periods of time for special Red
Cross buses to take them to the prisons. These buses are frequently stopped and searched by the Israeli authorities on the way to the prison.

At the prison itself, there are no waiting rooms, seats or bathrooms, and families are forced to wait for long hours in the cold or under the hot sun. One relative of a detainee told Addameer, “It was around 9am when we arrived at the outer gates of Megiddo Prison where we waited for three hours. It was extremely hot - there were no waiting rooms or seats - and nothing for us to stand under to protect us from the sun. Some of sat on the dirt or on whatever bags that we had with us. Some of us tore apart the bags so we could sit on the dirt. The children cried a lot, there was no water or shade and there was not even a single soldier to meet us on the front gates. There was one toilet but we couldn’t use it because it was so dirty.”

Visitors are often cursed at, beaten and subject to humiliating body searches including strip-searches. Another relative of a detainee reported to Addameer, “We were thirsty, tired and the water bottles that we had brought with us when we began our journey at 2am were empty. We passed through two tents, linked to each other. They checked our permits and then we lined up for a personal search. One of the female soldiers searched very deliberately and slowly and we had to stand still for a long time. After we finished the body search we moved to another tent where we found the items that we had brought for the visit thrown on a long table and on the ground. Bags were opened, and emptied on the dirt. Many of the clothes had disappeared and the rest covered with dirt.”

It should be pointed out that visitors to regular Israeli criminal prisoners do not experience the same humiliation as those of Palestinian political prisoners. Israeli criminal prisoners are entitled to visits without a wire grill between the visitor and the prisoner; they are also permitted phone calls and home visits in special cases such as the death of a loved one.

Female prisoners undertake hunger strikes for improved conditions
The 11 Palestinian female political prisoners in Ramle Prison embarked on an eight-day hunger strike in July in order to protest their conditions of detention. The specific demands of the prisoners were as follows:

- To be allowed to wear civilian clothing instead of prison attire.
- Opening of the doors between the cells
- Dividing the recreation time into two periods, a morning and evening period, in place of one session in the middle of the day.
- To be allowed to bring in vegetables and food from outside the prison
- Establishing study rooms
- To make available books that were sent to the female detainees from Askelan prisoners
- To make available appropriate health care. One of the prisoners, Amne Mona, is suffering from pains in her back due to torture she was exposed to while under interrogation. According to medical X-rays she needs treatment but this has not been provided.
- Appropriate bedding material.
- A regular schedule for recreation and mealtime. Sometimes the Prison Administration brings meals very early and cancel the recreation time.
- The right to choose their own representative. Amne Mona has been elected representative of the Palestinian female detainees and they insist that all communication between the Prison Administration and the prisoners should go through her. However the Prison Administration has refused to recognize Amne as the representative and has singled her out for maltreatment because of her status.
- Allow music cassettes into the prison.
- The right to be informed of the sources that provide newspapers, food and other items to the
prisoners, whether from the Palestinian Authority, Red Cross, or non-government organizations. Prisoners have refused to receive newspapers for several weeks because the Prison Administration refuses to inform them of the source of the papers.

During the July hunger strike, detainees were subject to extremely harsh treatment including severe beatings and the banning of milk and tea (milk is drunk through the hunger strike in order to preserve the detainees’ strength).

On the fifth day of the hunger strike, one of the detainees, Abeer, fell ill with a fever and was experiencing low blood pressure. The other detainees requested a doctor, who arrived with 30 to 50 prison guards and soldiers armed with clubs, shields and helmets. The Israeli criminal prisoners started to curse and throw water on the Palestinian prisoners and instead of preventing this the guards pushed Amne Mona and Abeer to the wall and handcuffed them. Abeer’s headscarf was removed and her hands and legs cuffed and chained. These chains were used to drag her from the room and she was then lifted from the ground and dropped. She was bleeding profusely from her mouth and body and her clothes were soaked with blood. A prison nurse named Rachel arrived and began kicking and beating her along with the guards as she lay on the ground. She was then taken to solitary confinement.

Shortly afterwards, around 50 Prison Guards re-entered the original cell where female criminal prisoners were cursing and yelling “Death to Amne”. The Guards handcuffed Amne from the back, placed cuffs on her legs and pushed her to the ground. They then started beating her with their clubs and fists and kicking her all over her body. They also grabbed her by her hair and throat and started to choke her. In the same manner as Mona, Amne was dragged along the ground by her hair and chains and taken to solitary confinement. The cell in which she was placed measured 1m in width, she was handcuffed and chained the entire night and prevented from drinking water. Guards harassed her all night long by shining a bright projector light on her in order to prevent her from sleeping. The female prisoners continued the hunger strike for the next two days while in solitary confinement. During this time the Prison Administration denied them salt which the prisoners drank with water in order to preserve their strength.

Palestinian Children in Telmond Prison
Telmond Prison holds Palestinian child political detainees and during a visit by Addameer’s attorney to the prison on 5 July, detainees informed Addameer that they had undertaken a hunger strike for two days to object the Prison Administration’s storming of section 8 in the prison with a large contingent of soldiers and anti-riot police. This force attacked the prisoners with tear gas, clubs and plastic shields, resulting in the injury of nine prisoners. One of them, Mohammed Badran, was moved to the hospital while another four were placed in solitary confinement. Moreover, the administration moved the prisoners to new sections, confiscated their belongings and filed new accusations against many of the detainees.

Following the attack, detainee Mohammed Badwan testified, “On Tuesday at around midnight I was in the cell. A group of approximately 30 anti-riot police stormed the cell along with soldiers who had their faces covered. There were eight of us in the cell. They started beating us heavily with clubs and plastic shields. They were beating me on my head, arms and abdomen. Then two soldiers dragged me on the ground into the leisure area outside the room. One of the soldiers started beating me on my head with a club and I started bleeding. I fell again to the ground. Another soldier pulled me up and sprayed my face with tear gas. I lost consciousness and woke up while being treated but my right hand was handcuff to the bed and both my legs chained together. The policeman told the nurse when she asked what happened to me that I fell from some stairs.”
Detainees in Askelan prison undertook a one day hunger strike on 28 June in solidarity with minors in Telmond Prison and to object to the refusal of the Prison Administration and the Commander of the Central Area to allow contact or telephone calls with minors in Telmond Prison. This contact is essential in order to make sure of the children prisoners' well-being and follows on from the refusal of the Israeli Prison Authorities' to move some of the adult prisoners from Askelan to the minors section so they can take care of the child prisoners.

Conditions in other Israeli Prisons are no better - Megiddo Prison is overcrowded and infested with insects, rats and snakes. Prisoners in Shatta Prison also undertook a one-day hunger strike on 18 July to improve their detention conditions.

**Deteriorating Health Conditions**
Addameer is gravely concerned with the intentional neglect by the Israeli Prisons Authorities to provide adequate health care for Palestinian political prisoners. Thirteen Palestinian political prisoners are currently in Ramle Prison Hospital waiting for treatment. During a visit to Haddereem Prison on 5 July, Addameer’s lawyer met with several detainees who complained of the deteriorating health situation. Several detainees have been placed permanently in the Prison Hospital, including: Abu Hassan Shalalda, Mohammed Abu Harwan, Khaled Ghnam, Murad Abu Mailaq (who uses a wheelchair and has been refused the assistance of another detainee), Ameen Al Aghbar, Akram Salame, Mohammed Bisharat, Zayed Al Kaylani (waiting 15 months for surgery to remove shrapnel from his eye and nose), Abu Ismail, Jumaa Assi and Sami Al Jamal (whose situation is extremely serious due to an injury in his abdomen that required the removal of a large section of his intestines and other internal organs). Addameer is particularly concerned for the situation of detainee Ahmed Attamimi, 40 years old from Nabi Saleh, who has been sentenced to life imprisonment and has been waiting for kidney dialysis. Attamimi’s health has worsened dramatically over the last period and he is in urgent need of dialysis. Attamimi requested a phone call to his family before being sent to the surgery but this was refused by the Prison Administration.

On the occasion of his 25th year of incarceration, Addameer confirms the importance of solidarity with Ahmed Jabara Abu Sukr in his just struggle to be released along with all the political detainees from Israeli prisons. Adameer urges all local and international organizations and those around the world concerned with justice, to work for the release of these detainees and for the immediate improvement in their detention conditions.

**Addameer urges everyone to sign the international Petition to Free Palestinian Child Political Prisoners. The petition can be found online at** [http://www.petitiononline.com/dcips/petition.html](http://www.petitiononline.com/dcips/petition.html) **and further information about this campaign can be viewed at** [http://www.dci-pal.org/prisonweb/childprisoners.html](http://www.dci-pal.org/prisonweb/childprisoners.html) ****