

The Impact of Israel's New Ultranationalist Government on the Palestinian Prisoners' Movement

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By the end of 2022, the Israeli occupation forces arrested in total around 7,000 Palestinians across the occupied Palestinian territories, with April 2022 recording the highest number of arrests reaching 1,228 cases, followed by May and October 2022, with 690 cases. The number of Palestinians arrested from occupied Jerusalem remained the highest among other Palestinian cities, with more than 3,000 cases of arrests, including 600 cases of house arrests. Notably, around 106 Palestinians from the Gaza Strip were arrested, including 64 Gazan fishermen. The year 2022 witnessed an unprecedented reliance of the Israeli occupation authorities on administrative detention to indefinitely hold Palestinians without charge or fair trial based on “secret information,” issuing around 2,409 administrative detention orders during the year 2022 alone, including new orders and renewal orders as well.

With the Israeli Knesset voting to ratify their 37th government, on 29 December 2022, under the leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the new government was quickly devoted, in its ultranationalist vision, to pursue policies that [make clear](#) the maintenance of racial domination and oppression over the Palestinian people; preferencing Israeli Jewish nationality—conferring exclusive rights of self-determination to the Jewish people. Such policies include the expansion of illegal settlement activities and the legalization of illegally built outposts, the weakening of the judicial authority, and a deadly increase in police brutality and military raids. As a result, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, as of 30 January 2023, the Israeli occupation forces have killed [35 Palestinians](#), including eight children and 20 Palestinians from Jenin alone.

This news report covers the impact of the occupying power's new government on the Palestinian Prisoners Movement from December 2022 to January 2023. In the short time that Netanyahu's coalition has taken power, a number of key developments have occurred that demonstrate the Israeli occupation authorities' extremist stance towards Palestinian political prisoners incarcerated and held captive by the State of Israel. Such developments also foreshadow the new government's hostile agenda towards Palestinian prisoners, with actions undertaken in the month of January paving the pathway for the further violations of Palestinian prisoners' and detainees' rights and subjugation and oppression of the Palestinian people as a whole.

In the second half of 2021, post the events of “*Operation Freedom Tunnel*”—when six Palestinian prisoners freed themselves from Gilboa prison—a special Israeli committee was formed to deal with the aftermath. One of the committee's most important recommendations was that prisoners, especially those sentenced to life, should be continuously transferred from rooms, sections, and prisons after certain periods of time. Specifically, the committee decreed that a prisoner should not stay in the same room for more than six months, in the same section of the prison for more than a

year, and in the same prison for more than three years. Additionally, the committee recommended that Islamic Jihad prisoners be confined in several rooms in different sections to dissolve the organization's core capacities and operating infrastructure. This continuous transfer and restriction of movement was categorically rejected by Palestinian prisoners. Palestinian prisoners formed an emergency committee in protest—and after [threatening a mass hunger strike](#), the committee reached an agreement with Israeli Prison Services to stop such movements and arbitrary measures. The incoming Israeli government seeks a return to the policy of continuous movement as demonstrated in the previous four weeks of prisoner transfers, thus effectively renouncing the agreement made by the emergency committee.

On 5 January 2023, Itamar Ben-Gvir—the newly appointed Minister of National Security—visited Nafha prison located in the southeastern desert area in the occupied Palestinian territory. Ben-Gvir's visit was intended to demonstrate his ultranationalist plans to target Palestinian political prisoners and implement even greater punitive measures against them. In a [statement](#) following his visit, Ben-Gvir wrote: *“I visited Nafha prison yesterday following the construction of new cells, to make sure that those who murdered Jews would not receive better prison conditions than the existing ones. I will continue to deal with the conditions of incarceration for prisoners while aiming to... pass the death penalty law for terrorists.”*

Notably, following Ben-Gvir's visit 80 Palestinian prisoners were transferred to Nafha prison from Hadarim prison between 8 and 9 January 2023—emptying Hadarim prison of all Palestinian political prisoners. Their forcible transfer was reported to be extremely harsh and degrading, with a complete strip search of each person, and not allowing persons to take with them any of their belongings. Those prisoners who refused to transfer were punished by solitary confinement for a few days before being forcibly transferred. Such collective and retaliatory penalties violate the absolute prohibition in customary international law against the collective punishment of protected people in occupied territory, as enshrined in Article 33(1) of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In response to the transfer of prisoners and Ben-Gvir's visit, Hassan Abed Rabbo—a representative of the Palestinian Commission of Detainees' and Ex-Detainees' Affairs—[detailed how](#) *“the situation in [Nafha] over the last couple of weeks has been terrible. The transfer of these prisoners is an attack on their lives.”*

On 8 January 2023, Ben-Gvir further announced plans to cancel regulations that allow any Knesset members to meet with Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli occupation jails. According to this announcement, Ben-Gvir intends to return to older procedures where only one member from each party is allowed to visit prisoners—with visits conducted under strict supervision by the Israel Prison Service. [In his words](#): *“I believe that these meetings of Knesset members with security prisoners are meant to give prisoners a boost, and they may lead to incitement and the promotion of terrorist propaganda. The time has come to put a stop to it. I'll not allow visits that support and incite terrorism under my watch.”*

On 5 January 2023, the Israeli occupation authorities released Karim Younis, the longest-serving continuous political prisoner, after 40 years of incarceration. Two weeks later, Palestinian political prisoner Maher Younis—Karim’s cousin—was released from prison as well. Both Maher and Karim Younis were born in Wadi A’ra in the occupied 1948 territories and hold Israeli citizenship. Following Karim Younis’s release, Itamar Ben-Gvir instructed law enforcement to prevent gatherings in support of Younis’s return—[stating that](#) “*until the government passes a law imposing the death penalty for terrorists, I will do everything in my power to ensure that they will leave prison in shame.*” Currently, there are 23 Palestinian political prisoners arrested before the Oslo Accords in 1993, which the Israeli occupation authorities refuse to release under any circumstances, even in prisoners’ exchange deals, until the ending of their sentence. Further, on 11 January 2023, proposed legislation intended to revoke Israeli citizenship or residency from Palestinian prisoners from the 1948 occupied territories and Jerusalem cleared its preliminary reading by the Israeli Knesset. The legislation applies to both Israeli citizens and permanent residents incarcerated following a “terror” conviction.

This comes following the Israeli occupation authorities’ [unlawful forcible deportation](#) of French-Palestinian human rights lawyer and former political prisoner, [Salah Hammouri](#), exiling him to France, after revoking his permanent Jerusalem residency under vague allegations of “breach of allegiance.” Such a move constitutes a war crime of forcible deportation of a protected civilian from the occupied territory, as defined in Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. More importantly, residency and/or citizenship revocation stands as a horrifying escalation of Israel’s systematic practice of demographic engineering and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

On 15 January 2023, 70 prisoners were transferred from Magiddo prison Section 8 to Gilboa prison in a repressive, arbitrary, and sudden manner. Located in the north of the 1948 occupied Palestinian territories, Gilboa prison—a high-security facility—was established in 2004 next to Shatta prison in the Beesan area. The next day, on 16 January 2023, Israeli Occupation Forces broke into Magiddo prison with weapons and military dogs to forcibly transfer of Islamic Jihad prisoners. Also on 16 January 2023, individuals incarcerated at Naqab prison closed down part of the facility to protest the transfer of prisoners within the institution itself. In addition, protests occurred against the isolation of Zafer Al-Rimawi, the uncle of the two martyrs [Jawad and Zafer Al-Rimawi](#) who were killed by Israeli Occupation Forces on 29 November 2022.

On 22 January 2023, 35 prisoners were arbitrarily transferred from Rimon prison to Gilboa prison, with another 25 prisoners expected to be transferred the next day. The transfer of prisoners between jails constitutes a strategy to weaken and destabilize Palestinian unity and efforts in protesting their unjust and arbitrary detention conditions—making it easier for the Israeli occupation and apartheid regime to control existing and new prisoners. Most recently, on 28 January 2023, Israeli Special Units raided Ofer, Naqab, and Magiddo implementing internal prisoner transfers, and putting some prisoners in collective and individual isolation. [Prison raids](#) by Israeli Special Units, that are

extremely violent in nature, give way to a host of abuses and human rights violations and serve as one method of collective punishment, torture, and ill-treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

Palestinian administrative detainee Bilal Kayed—arbitrarily held without charge or trial since 28 August 2022 in Magiddo prison—informed Addameer that the Israeli Prison Services at Magiddo prison officially informed the prisoners about instating a set of procedural changes sanctioned by “higher” Israeli occupation authorities to restrict the daily activities of Palestinian prisoners. It should be noted that these measures, while not yet implemented, include:

- The forcible transfer of prisoners every three months from their designated cells, without prior notice or consent from their prison representatives.
- Changes to the types of goods available in the canteen.
- Limiting family visits to half an hour per month.
- Limiting free/yard time to one hour a day.
- Abolishing the prisoners’ representatives committee.
- Separating incarcerated family members, where they will not be grouped in the same prison or in the same rooms. Further, the prisoner’s familial place of residence will not be taken into account in terms of their location of incarceration.
- Prohibiting prisoners from gathering in sections and rooms for organizational purposes.
- Hanging the Israeli flag in each prison room.
- A complete sweep of prison cells in order to confiscate “contraband”—specifically, phones that entered the prison “illegally.”

In addition to restrictions at Magiddo prison, the Israeli Prison Services at Rimon prison also informed Palestinian prisoners that similar changes are imminent—though the contents of such changes were not revealed. The intent of these arbitrary and punitive measures are to restrict prisoners’ movements and communications, and further isolate them from the outside world. Moreover, such measures directly impact the prisoners’ [family visits](#), implementing more harsh visiting conditions and overall limiting the possibility of family visits.

Palestinian female prisoners incarcerated at Damon prison reported to Addameer’s lawyer during a prison visit on 19 January 2023 that noticeable changes have occurred regarding Israeli prison guards, security, and intelligence officers in Damon prison. Whereas the daily cell check that was previously done by female prison guards only is now being implemented by female prison guards accompanied by male prison guards as well. Notably, the Israeli Prison Services in Damon prison has recently banned the entry of medical glasses under the pretext that they contain iron. Further, no developments have occurred regarding children under the age of six visiting Damon prison to allow them to visit without a barrier to embrace their mothers. Most recently, on 29 January 2023, Israeli Special Units raided the women’s section—confiscating all electronic equipment and completely shutting down the section, isolating the female prisoners from the outside world, and

holding one-woman prisoner in solitary confinement. Hence, Addameer has no information regarding the female prisoners' conditions. In total, there are 31 Palestinian women prisoners, 29 incarcerated under harsh conditions in Damon prison, including three minors, and two women arbitrarily detained awaiting trial.

The large-scale measures adopted by Israeli Prison Services, at the behest of the Israeli occupation authorities, regarding retaliatory and punitive measures aimed at the entirety of the over 4,700 Palestinian political prisoners, in conjunction with the mass transfer of Palestinian prisoners constitute clear forms of collective punishment. Specifically, the mass detention of Palestinian prisoners as protected persons in the territory of the Occupying Power further violates Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and constitutes a war crime of "forcible transfer," under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Thus, Addameer highlights with grave concern the escalation of arbitrary and punitive measures implemented by the Israeli occupation authorities against Palestinian political prisoners. Current events on the ground only mirror what to expect inside prisons. Consequently, the Palestinian Prisoners' Movement affirms that any measures affecting the daily and organizational lives of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli occupation prisons will only be met with organized and collective protests beginning in March if the Israeli occupation and apartheid regime continues its hostile and severe approach. Now more than ever, the international community must abide by its responsibilities under international law and uphold its legal and moral commitment to reclaim and foster the protection of Palestinian human rights within the larger framework of the right to self-determination.