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ADDAMEER PRISONER SUPPORT AND HUMAN RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

PALESTINIAN WOMEN POLITICAL PRISONERS
SYSTEMATIC FORMS OF POLITICAL AND GENDER-BASED STATE VIOLENCE

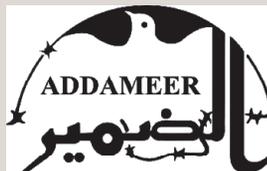


PALESTINIAN WOMEN POLITICAL PRISONERS SYSTEMATIC FORMS OF POLITICAL AND GENDER-BASED STATE VIOLENCE

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UNIFEM (part of UN Women)¹ is the women's fund at the United Nations, dedicated to advancing women's rights and achieving gender equality. It provides financial and technical assistance to innovative programmes and strategies that foster women's empowerment. UNIFEM works on the premise that it is the fundamental right of every woman to live a life free from discrimination and violence, and that gender equality is essential to achieving development and to building just societies.

The views, opinions and terminologies expressed in this study are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the government of Spain, the Spanish Agency of International Cooperation for Development (AECID), UNIFEM (part of UN Women), the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.



**Palestinian
Counseling Center**
المركز الفلسطيني للإرشاد



¹ www.unwomen.org



The Role of Women Political Prisoner Releases in the Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination

The role of Palestinian political prisoner releases was an important feature of the Permanent Status Negotiations that took place during the years of the Oslo Peace Process (1993-2001), and remains an important issue that is sure to feature prominently in future bilateral negotiations.

Of concern, however, is the extent to which female Palestinian prisoners' unique conditions of arrest and detention will be addressed by both Palestinian and Israeli authorities. While the daily conditions of female Palestinian prisoners and demands for their release have often been neglected in past stages of political negotiations, Palestinian women detainees have consistently organized methods of resistance for the prisoner's movement and the broader struggle for Palestinian self-determination. More specifically, Palestinian women prisoners have been resisting the unfair treatment they receive and the poor conditions of Israeli prisons since the First Intifada, using various forms of protests such as collective hunger strikes. They have also coordinated external demonstrations and sit-ins with former prisoners and various activists groups across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and throughout the international community. These forms of resistance have been a powerful instrument for voicing their needs and gaining international recognition and support.

On 10 October 1995, Israel freed 882 Palestinians as part of the first stage of the Oslo II Agreement. While one woman was released,¹ 21 remaining women prisoners slated for release refused to leave in protest of Israel's refusal to release four other women, citing Israel's pledge in the Oslo II Agreement and calling for the release of all Palestinian women prisoners as soon as the agreement went into effect. The 21 women barricaded themselves inside the prison cells and vowed to remain there until Israeli authorities agreed to release the four remaining women. On 11 February 1997, nearly 17 months after their scheduled release under the Oslo II Agreement, all of the Palestinian women prisoners were finally freed.

Their actions of solidarity and collective acts of defiance against Israel as the occupying power marked an important achievement in both the Palestinian prisoners' movement and the broader struggle towards Palestinian self-determination. This struggle however, continues to be plagued by the gross and systematic human rights violations committed as part of Israel's ongoing belligerent occupation of Palestinian territory.

¹ 18-year-old Bashayer Abu Laban had been in isolation in prison and was not aware of the boycott. Serge Schmemmann, "20 Jailed Arab Women Say No to Israeli Offer of Freedom", The New York Times, 9 October 2005 (available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/09/world/20-jailed-arab-women-say-no-to-israeli-offer-of-freedom.html>).

I. BACKGROUND ON PALESTINIAN WOMEN POLITICAL PRISONERS

Since the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory in 1967, Palestinians have been charged with offenses under Israeli military law and tried in military courts. Over the last 43 years, an estimated 700,000 Palestinians have been detained under Israeli military orders in the oPt, which constitutes approximately 20 percent of the total Palestinian population in the (OPT), and as much as 40 percent of the total male Palestinian population. During this time, an estimated 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and/or detained under Israeli military orders.

As of November 2010, 36 Palestinian women remain incarcerated in Israel's detention centers and prisons, mainly Ha-Sharon and Damon. **Both of these prisons are located outside the 1967 occupied territory, in direct contravention of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention,² which states that an Occupying Power must detain residents of occupied territory in prisons inside the occupied territory.**

In addition to the illegality of Israel's practices under international law, the practical consequence of this system is that many prisoners have difficulty meeting with Palestinian defense counsel and do not receive family visits as their attorneys and relatives are denied permits to visit on "security grounds". Moreover, both Hasharon and Damon prisons lack a gender-sensitive approach and, as such, women prisoners often suffer from harsh imprisonment conditions including medical negligence;

Detention Facts and Figures

- ♀ **700,000 Palestinians arrested since 1967.**
- ♀ **10,000 Palestinian women arrested since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory in 1967.**
- ♀ **6,089 Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli detention as of November 2010.**
- ♀ **Between 2007 and November 2008, 125 Palestinian women were arrested, detained or imprisoned in Israeli prisons and detention centers (56% of them between the ages of 20 and 30 and 13% of them under the age of 18).**
- ♀ **As of November 2010, there are 36 Palestinian women prisoners: 5 have been sentenced to 1 or more life sentences, 15 have been sentenced to a minimum of 10 years, and 4 of them are being administratively detained for an indefinite period of time.**

² Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War, Geneva, 12 August 1949.

denial of education; denial of family visits; including for mothers with young children; solitary confinement; overcrowded cells that are often filled with insects and dirt; and lack natural light. Personal health and hygiene needs are rarely addressed by prisons authorities, even in cases involving the detention of pregnant women.

Moreover, the majority of Palestinian women prisoners are subjected to some form of torture or ill-treatment throughout the process of their arrest and detention, including beatings, insults, threats, body searches and sexually explicit harassment and psychological abuse. Upon arrest, women detainees are typically not informed of where they are being taken and are rarely explained their rights during interrogation. These techniques of torture and ill-treatment are used not only as means to intimidate Palestinian women detainees but also as tools to humiliate and coerce them into giving confessions. While Israel's prison authorities and occupation forces recruit women soldiers to detain and accompany women prisoners during transfers, the female soldiers responsible for these procedures are no less violent towards Palestinian detainees than their male counterparts. In January 2010, "Breaking the Silence", an Israeli NGO that collects anonymous testimonies from Israel's occupation forces in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, released a 122-page booklet documenting the increasing levels of violence inflicted upon Palestinians by Israeli women soldiers.³ The testimonies compiled in the study reveal that the Israeli women soldiers deploy violent methods of control against Palestinian men and women in an effort to seek respect and recognition from male soldiers and their superiors.



UNIFEM/Ventura Formicone

³ Breaking the Silence. 31 January 2010 (available at: http://www.shovrimshatika.org/news_item_e.asp?id=32).

Continuous Violations of Palestinian Women Prisoners' Basic Rights: Unlawful Conditions under Israeli Detention

While Israeli detention conditions vary from prison to prison, in no case are they acceptable, nor do they meet women's needs. Currently Neve Terza Prison in Ramleh is the only specialized women's prison facility in all of Israel. Many Palestinian women have been detained there since the wave of arrests that accompanied events following the beginning of the Second Intifada in September 2000, in a special section designated for what Israel classifies as "security prisoners". One of the many effects on Palestinian women political prisoners who are classified as "security prisoners" and held in Neve Terza is that they are sometimes placed in the same sections as Israeli women criminal offenders. These Israeli women prisoners often threaten, assault and humiliate the Palestinian women prisoners through various forms of verbal and physical abuse. In addition, Palestinian women detainees are also discriminated against in the facility; enjoying less or at times, no recreation time, and living in dorms without access to books, newspapers or other media. Neve Terza now serves the purpose of holding Palestinian women kept in isolation and for short-term detention during transfers. Other women detainees are imprisoned in old jails that date back to the British Mandate period (1922-1948) and lack modern day infrastructure. These facilities, designed for and by men, consequently rarely meet the gender-specific needs of women prisoners.

Since the Vienna Declaration on Crime and Justice in 2000, which focused in part on the special needs of women as criminal justice personnel, victims, offenders and prisoners, many studies have shown that **women's needs in prison deserve special attention from the United Nations, policy-makers and practitioners.** Among the set of needs specific to women prisoners, issues pertaining to health care require urgent attention, a right strategically denied by the Israeli Prison Service (IPS).

The IPS has adopted a systematic policy of medical negligence regarding Palestinian prisoners held in its prisons and detention centers. In addition to medical negligence, the denial of cultural and gender sensitive medical treatment has affected women prisoners' health conditions pre and post-release. A study conducted by Addameer in September 2008 revealed that **approximately 38% of Palestinian female prisoners suffer from treatable**

diseases that go untreated. The poor quality of food and lack of essential nutrients cause women detainees to suffer from weight loss, general weakness, anaemia and iron deficiency. They are also exposed to harsh treatment (such as routine practices of physical and psychological punishment and humiliation) from both male and female prison guards, who demonstrate little to no regard for their wellbeing or special needs, even when ill or pregnant.

Harsh imprisonment conditions such as lack of fresh air and sunlight; moisture in the winter and heat in the summer; dirty overcrowded cells which are infested with insects; combined with stress, poor diet and isolation from families contribute to frequent menstruation perturbations. Many women also suffer from rheumatism and dermatological problems due to the moisture infiltrating their cells in the winter. In the summer, poor ventilation, lack of fresh air and the prevalence of cockroaches and other bugs also contribute to skin diseases. Despite requests made by women prisoners, the prison authorities have repeatedly refused to provide them with cleaning products.

Palestinian women prisoners suffering from treatable diseases such as asthma, diabetes, kidney and eye diseases, sickle cell anaemia, cancer, and seizures have little to no access to medical services. Long delays in providing substandard medical treatment are typical. Although all prisons include a medical clinic, physicians are on duty irregularly and specialized medical healthcare is generally unavailable. To date, there are **no specialized gynecological services** available for Palestinian women held in Israeli prisons and detention centers, despite their continuous requests for access to such services and complaints launched against the IPS's repeated denials. Of particular concern is the absence of trained Arabic-speaking female specialists. The denial of gender-sensitive social services, **in addition to culturally and religiously sensitive treatment, place women who are suffering from health concerns in an extremely vulnerable and uncomfortable position.** For instance, when women prisoners require hospitalization in Israeli institutions, the gynecological care that is provided is often culturally insensitive causing them further stress. This form of discrimination is compounded by the denial of other forms of culturally and religiously sensitive social services and professionals. The effects of this discriminatory treatment amount to violations of Palestinian women's human rights and, accordingly, often lead to conditions of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

II. PALESTINIAN WOMEN PRISONERS' TESTIMONIES OF POLITICAL AND GENDER-BASED STATE VIOLENCE UNDER ISRAELI DETENTION

Denial of Rights to Pregnant Women Prisoners Pre- and Post-Delivery

Pregnant Palestinian women have not escaped the mass arrests of Palestinian civilians under Israel's unlawful occupation regime. Between 2003-2008, Addameer documented four cases of Palestinian women detainees who were forced to give birth while held in Israeli prisons, all of whom received very limited to no pre- and post-natal care.

As the incarceration of pregnant women poses a high risk not only to the woman herself, but also to the birth outcomes, posterior growth and development of the newborn, their cases are of outmost concern. Pregnant women in Israeli prisons and detention centers do not enjoy any preferential treatment in terms of diet, living space or transfers to hospitals.

Pregnant detainees who are transferred to hospitals to give birth are moved only under strict security supervision, with the woman's hands and feet typically shackled with metal chains. The women are then chained to their beds until they enter the delivery room and are shackled once again only minutes after delivery.

However, these are not the only pressing issues facing pregnant Palestinian women detainees, as attested by the experiences of Fatema Younis Azzeq who was 40 years old at the time of her arrest.

On 5 May 2007, Fatema Yunnis Azzeq, then pregnant with her eighth child, was arrested at the Erez checkpoint in Gaza on her way to a hospital in Jerusalem. Both Fatema and her niece, who was accompanying her to the hospital,

Prisoner Profile: Fatema Younis Azzeq	
	Date of birth: 30/11/1968
	Place of residence: Alshaja'iyeh, Gaza
	Date of arrest: 5 May 2007
	Place of arrest: Erez Checkpoint
	Place of detention: Hasharon Prison
	Released: October 2009

were questioned and strip searched by Israeli soldiers at the checkpoint in a manner that Fatema describes as “extremely humiliating”. At this point, Fatema was beaten, cursed at, tied up and blindfolded. She was then taken to the Ashkelon Interrogation Center where she was subjected to intense psychological and physical torture. The forms of bodily violence inflicted upon her by the Israeli interrogators and prison guards, including being tied to a chair throughout the entire interrogation, exposure to extremely cold temperatures, sleep deprivation and repeated punches, led to sudden intensive bleeding. In addition to being subjected to torture, no special care or extra provisions were offered to Fatema to ensure her wellbeing and that of her unborn baby. Concerned that her ill-treatment would result in the death of her unborn baby, she requested to see a doctor only to be mocked by Israeli authorities and denied access. Moreover, the food provided to her was no different to that provided to other detainees and pre-natal care, although available, was very limited. In January 2008, Fatema was transferred to Ma’eer Tsaba hospital where she gave birth to her son Youssef. Her experience during and after labor can be described as nothing less than inhumane: Fatema’s hands and feet were tied immediately before and immediately after delivery.

During labor and the early days of Youssef’s life, Fatema was denied the most basic of her human rights – the right for her husband or any other member of her family to be by her side during delivery. Even her lawyers were prohibited from seeing her during this time. While this form of isolation was particularly difficult during the stages of pregnancy and post-delivery, as a prisoner from Gaza, **Fatema**

“After Youssef’s birth, one of my hands and one foot were tied to the bed. I stayed in a special room for a couple of hours, then moved to my room. On the second day they cuffed my feet and brought my child only twice a day for feeding”

Fatema Younis Azzeq, former female prisoner

was denied family visits throughout the duration of her time in detention. As with all other political prisoners from Gaza, family members of detainees are denied visitation rights as a result of the unilateral suspension of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Gaza Family Visit Programme which began 6 June 2007.

After delivery, Fatema and her newborn baby Youssef were moved back to HaSharon, where they shared a cell with five other detainees. Both the mother and newborn child suffered from the conditions in the overcrowded cell, with its poor hygiene and lack of exposure to the outside world. Fatema suffered from postnatal depression and rheumatism of the bones. Youssef also fell ill in March 2008, and an entire month passed before the IPS actually provided him with a pediatrician. Article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ratified by Israel on 3 October 1981, stipulates that **“States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation”**. However, as Fatema’s case demonstrates, the pre- and post-childbirth treatment of pregnant Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons clearly contravenes both Fatema and Youssef’s human rights and Israel’s obligations under international law.

Sexual Torture and Ill-Treatment

A frequent complaint expressed by many Palestinian women political prisoners is Israel’s routine and systematic practice of strip and body searching, a process by which all, or almost all of their clothing is forcibly removed by Israeli soldiers, sometimes including their undergarments. During strip searches, female prisoners are often asked to squat while naked, and are frequently subjected to intrusive internal body searches. Those who refuse to comply with these practices are often sent to isolation cells. These searches often occur during transfers to court hearings, and can sometimes take place in the middle of the night as a punitive measure. According to Dr Mahmoud Saiwail, the director of a treatment and rehabilitation centre for victims of torture in Ramallah, strip searches of women prisoners can even amount to torture in certain circumstances. The cases of three Palestinian women prisoners held in Israeli detention, who were needlessly subjected to a humiliating and unlawfully punitive strip search by their Israeli prison guards, provides an illustrative view into this ongoing and appalling practice.

On the day the incident took place, Israeli female prison guards stormed the cell holding three Palestinian women prisoners. The guards walked in and warned the prisoners not to move anything. They then covered the women’s hair with headscarves, shackled their hands and took them one by one to the bathroom, located outside of the

room, where they were forcibly strip searched. All three prisoners were asked to remove their clothes including their underwear. They were also asked to crouch naked on the ground, but as they firmly refused to do so, the female guards eventually abandoned the idea. After the strip search, the three prisoners were allowed to get dressed and leave the bathroom, but they were forced to wait outside as a special unit of guards conducted a search of their room. The guards justified their search by claiming that the three women detainees were hiding a forbidden item in their room, “a phone or a weapon”. The guards dismantled all the womens’ electronic equipment and the sink pipe. After finding nothing, they confiscated their radio and left.

Sexual harassment of Palestinian women prisoners also occurs through threats of rape (including threats of rape of their family members) and sexually degrading insults made by prison personnel. These occurrences are a fundamental part of Palestinian women’s prison experience and should be understood as a common and systematic form of racial and gender-based state violence. Research has shown that Israel’s prison authorities deliberately exploit Palestinian women’s fears by playing on patriarchal norms as well as gender stereotypes within particular customs of Palestinian society.⁴ Accordingly, occurrences of sexual assault are a sensitive issue for Palestinian women and their families, making post-assault resources difficult to obtain. Israel’s routine practice of strip and body searching women prisoners as a method of punishment violates its obligations under both international human rights and humanitarian law, including the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states in Article 7 that: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment...”. Similarly, Article 3(1)(c) of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) forbids “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment”.⁵



4 Nahla Abdo, “Palestinian Munadelat: Between Western Representation and Live Reality,” in *Thinking Palesine*, ed. Ronit Lentin, Zed Books, New York, 2008.
5 Peace Women, “Israel and the Occupied Territories, Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden”, 31 March 2005 (available at: <http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/OPT/Womencarryburden.html>).

Denial of Family Visits as Collective Punishment: The Impact of Palestinian Women's Detention on the Family

"We didn't know that they were going to take her away. If we knew, we would have talked to her, kissed her, spent time with her, but they just took her..."

Mohammad, son of female Palestinian prisoner Qahira Saeed As-Saadi

The conditions of arrest and detention of Palestinian women political prisoners impact women individually and also serve as a form of collective punishment against their entire family. Consider, for instance, the case-study of Qahira Saeed As-Saadi. After arresting two other members of the As-Saadi family the previous day, the Israeli Occupying Forces returned on 8 May 2002 to arrest Qahira. After having experienced the trauma of witnessing their two uncles detained, Qahira's four children were again forced to watch as their mother was assaulted and detained by Israeli troops. Qahira recounts her experience as "horrific" and describes,

"I was beaten, dragged on the floor and pulled by my hair."

All too often, such incidents of violence during arrest have an enormous psychological impact on the children who witness them.

After being brought to the Al Moskobiyeh interrogation centre in Jerusalem, Qahira was subjected to further physical and psychological torture, including bodily and verbal abuse. Of particular concern, Qahira was told that her 10 and 16-year-old daughters had also been arrested and would be raped unless Qahira complied with the prison authorities' demands.

Qahira's children were prevented from visiting



their mother for the first two years of her imprisonment. While three of her children can now visit her every two weeks as part of the Family Visit Program of the ICRC, her oldest daughter is repeatedly denied a permit to visit on “security grounds” unknown to her and, to date, has only been granted access one to two times a year throughout the past eight years of Qahira’s imprisonment.

The children are allowed to spend only half an hour with their mother even though the entire trip to the prison and back takes them around ten hours because of extreme delays caused by continual baggage and body searches. During the visit, the children are separated from their mother by a big glass divider and cannot touch her; instead, they are forced to speak to their mother through telephones.

In addition to the impact of inadequate family contact on the children of women prisoners, such conditions have compounding effects on the psychological and physical wellbeing of women in prison. Research has shown that the prohibition of family visits for women in prison often

“We tell her that we miss you and we can’t live without you. Without you, we wouldn’t have come into this world. My mother then tells us that she is tired and that she can’t live in the prison and she asks us to pray that she is released so that she can live with us. Then she starts crying.”

“We leave the house at 6:30 a.m. and take the Red Cross buses to the Jalameh Checkpoint where they search us. It takes such a long time. From Jalameh, we board Israeli buses and go to the prison. We are searched in the prison many times. Each room we enter, the guards lock the doors on us and then search us. Then we go into the next room where they do the same thing.”

Sandy, Qahira’s daughter

leads to conditions of anxiety and depression and exacerbate feelings of isolation. While visits to Palestinian prisoners are currently permitted twice a month in theory, as opposed to the once a month restriction formally imposed on family visitation rights, prisoners and family members are subjected to many restrictions stemming from Israel’s practice of detaining Palestinian prisoners outside 1967 occupied territory, in violation of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), which explicitly prohibits “individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power”.

Another practical result of this system is that many prisoners have difficulty meeting with Palestinian defense counsel. This unlawful practice also dramatically reduces access to family visits, as relatives are often denied permits to visits based on “security grounds”. In cases where permits are granted to family members of Palestinian prisoners to visit them in Israeli jails, they cannot visit them freely, or according to their own schedule, as they are often subjected to Israel’s system of closures and restrictions of movement imposed on the oPt. These routine forms of geographic isolation used against prisoners must be considered a form of cruel and unusual punishment that often inflicts severe mental suffering on the prisoner and their relatives by severing the ties between them.⁶ The maintenance of ties between family members is therefore overly dependent on the Israeli permit system, which imposes huge restrictions on the Palestinian population – especially males – aged between 16 and 45, whose right to visit are denied on a regular basis.⁷ As demonstrated in the case of Qahira and her family, the restrictions on visitation rights not only violate the United Nations Standards Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners but have lasting and compounding effects on the entire family.



⁶ Bastick M. and Townhead L., “Women in Prison, A Commentary on the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners”, Quakers United Nations Office, 2008.

⁷ Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, In Need of Protection: Palestinian Female Prisoners in Israeli Detention, November 2008.

Prisoner Profile: Salwa and Sara – Two Girls in Administrative Detention

The cases of Salwa Salah and Sara Siureh, two cousins from Bethlehem, mark the first cases of administrative detention of Palestinian girls under the age of 18. Both girls, aged 16 and a half at the time of their arrest, spent a total of seven months in Israeli adult detention facilities, without charge or trial.

Salwa and Sara were arrested from home at 2:00 a.m. on 5 June 2008. A week later, they were issued with their first administrative detention order, which was renewed on 5 October 2008 for an additional four months. The order and renewal were based on the accusation that the girls were ‘dangerous’ to the public, despite the fact that the Israeli military prosecutor had not filed any charges against the girls, and no evidence was provided to substantiate these allegations.

Throughout their arrest and detention, Salwa’s and Sara’s human rights were consistently violated by Israeli authorities. In addition to the excessive force Israeli soldiers used during the arrests, the girls also reported having suffered extremely abusive behavior from female police officers escorting them during transfers between detention facilities.

They were also subjected to humiliating strip searches, during which a female officer forcibly inspected their hair, body and mouth. Additionally, throughout their detention, they were held with adult Palestinian female prisoners in Damon Prison. Such an arrangement is in blatant contravention to international law. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that anyone below the age of 18 is considered a child. Although such a definition is used by Israel in relation to its own citizens, it is not applied to Palestinians in the oPt: Israeli military orders that govern the oPt provide that any Palestinian above the age of 16 is considered an adult. Thus, all Palestinian girls between the ages of 16 to 18, as well as those under age 16, are detained together with adult Palestinian women.

Moreover, Palestinian prisoners are frequently held under Israeli detention orders without charge or trial for “reasons of State security”, in a manner that violates Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The unlawful and discriminatory use of administrative detention orders by Israel is levied in practice against all Palestinians regardless of gender or age. At present, there are four Palestinian women political prisoners held on administrative detention orders.

III. REINTEGRATION INTO SOCIETY AND LIFE AFTER PRISON

“Ever since I was released from prison, I don’t go out much. I always need to close the door of the room I am sitting in. My family is convinced that this is an effect of prison... There were no institutions that helped me when I was released; no one reached out to see how I was feeling, whether I needed anything or whether I needed help to redefine my relationship with my family.”⁸

R.D., former Palestinian woman prisoner

Social reintegration of prisoners includes rehabilitation during and after imprisonment by ensuring access to Palestinian-administered social services, as well as immediate and long-term post-release support. The issue of reintegration of Palestinian prisoners is unique in the sense that it is affected by two authorities that are in conflict with one another in the midst of an unequal distribution of power, where one authority is occupied by the other.

Although the UN Minimum Standard Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners recommend that “necessary steps be taken to ensure for the prisoner a gradual return to life in society” through a pre-release programme, Israel denies such services to Palestinian prisoners. Moreover, a number of the key issues that affect a prisoner’s life after release and inadvertently determine the success of his/her rehabilitation process are controlled by Israeli authorities, including the quality of prison conditions and safety in prison, which can have lasting effects on a prisoner’s mental and physical health, access to education resources, adequate contact with the outside world, specialist medical care and nutritional support. These issues, among others, are explicitly a matter of Israeli responsibility, and Israeli authorities largely fail to provide for these rights. It is important to note however that these rights and services must be administered only by Palestinians; as such, the Israeli authorities and the IPS must grant full, unhindered access to Palestinian programs and service providers in this regard. Israel’s failure to provide full access to these rights and services undermines the process of creating a long-term post-release strategy for Palestinian women prisoners.

⁸ Addameer Interview with R.D., 10 July 2008.

Some of the initiatives provided by the Ex-Detainees Rehabilitation Programme, operated by the Palestinian Ministry of Detainees and Ex-Detainees, include educational assistance, vocational training, wage subsidies, self-employment loans, project loans and health insurance. However, to date there has been no long-term, gender-specific reintegration and rehabilitation programmes established by the Ministry. While a special unit has been established to deal with youth and child detainees, no such facility for women has yet been created. In addition, although the legal section of the Child and Youth Unit created by the Ministry provides legal counseling to women prisoners along with child detainees, this support and interest stops once the woman is released.

Interviews conducted with former Palestinian women prisoners by both Addameer and the Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC) revealed that these women are in great need of psychological support especially in the first weeks and months following their release. The lack of services and support mechanisms during their prison experience and upon their release, combined with the overwhelming initial media interest, only exacerbates ex-prisoners' feelings of disappointment and isolation, which can often lead to an increase in mental health concerns. The transition from life in prison to life outside is therefore even more problematic. At a workshop held by the PCC on 16 August 2008 in Ramallah to assess former women prisoners' needs, a call for psycho-social support was reiterated by many participants. Former Palestinian women prisoners affirmed at the workshop that a holistic approach to pre- and post-release programs needs to be developed in order to include their families in support schemes.



IV. WHAT YOU CAN DO

“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”
Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize, South African activist

To work in solidarity with Palestinian women political prisoners, urgent action is required. Here are a few things that you can do to show support and solidarity:

♀ **Support a woman in prison by sending her a solidarity letter.**

Please contact Addameer for a full and updated list of Palestinian women prisoners. While we request that you send the personal letters directly to the prison facilities, please copy Addameer at info@addameer.ps so that we can keep track of the letters of support. You may also contact Addameer directly to organize an educational event and/or presentation on Palestinian prisoners.



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Damon Prison

P.O. Box 98
Daliyat Ha-Carmel
Israel

HaSharon Prison

Even Yehuda
P.O. Box 7
40 330 Israel

♀ **Write directly to the Israel Prison Service, your elected representative, and/or the International Bar Association (IBA)** to demand treatment for all prisoners that meets or surpasses the UN Minimum Standard Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners and to ensure that all prisoners and detainees held by Israel are granted their full rights to:

- * Protection against practices of sexual violence including strip searches and invasive body searches, shackling of pregnant women during labour, as well as threats and/or other forms of sexual assault;
- * Formal education for girls under the age of 18, the provision of books and study materials inside prisons that adhere to the content and standards of Palestinian developed curriculum education;
- * Nutritional diet programs, especially for pregnant detainees;
- * Unhindered access to Palestinian administered health care and other social services such as pre-and post prison release re-integration programs, gynecology visits, dental care, counseling, psychology and all other forms of medical or social services required by female Palestinian prisoners and administered by Arabic-speaking (Palestinian) female specialists upon request; and open family visits, especially for mothers of minors.

Please direct your advocacy letters to:

Fiona Paterson, Director of Human Rights Institute

International Bar Association
1 Stephen St, 10th Floor
London, W1T 1AT United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)20 7691 6868 **Fax:** +44 (0)20 7691 6544
E-mail: fiona.paterson@int-bar.org

♀ **Write to Israel's Military Advocate General** and demand an end to the use of administrative detention orders.

Please direct your advocacy letter to the following addresses:

Israel Prison Service

Ministry of Public Security
P.O. Box 18182
Jerusalem 91181
Israel

Brigadier General Avihai Mandelblit

Military Judge Advocate General
6 David Elazar Street
Hakirya, Tel Aviv
Israel

Fax: +972 3 608 0366, +972 3 569 4526

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