

BAY AREA WOMEN IN BLACK

Palestinian Women in Israeli Prisons

May 21, 2011

Shortly after the brutal murders this past March of a Jewish settler family in Itamar, occupied Palestine, hundreds of Israeli soldiers entered the nearby village of Awarta where they remained for five days, occupying and defecating in homes, smashing household objects, and beating and arresting people.¹ Among those arrested were over 100 women, of whom about 20 remain in custody, with no charges yet brought against them.² As the most vulnerable among the Palestinian people, along with their children, Palestinian women are routinely kidnapped³ and imprisoned, as an attempt to weaken the family, the backbone of Palestinian liberation.



Palestinian women are generally held in 3 different prisons, namely Telmond (in Hasharon), Neve Tirza (in Ramleh) and Al-Jamelah (in Kishon), all of which are administered by the Israeli Prison Services. Palestinian women are usually detained in harsher conditions than men, in jails dating back to the British Mandate period (1922-1948), which lack modern day infrastructure or gender-sensitive health care. Humid, unhygienic, deprived of natural sunlight and overcrowded, these facilities rarely meet women's needs.

While interrogated, usually by male jailers, women are often subjected to such forms of cruel treatment as humiliation, intimidation, sleep deprivation, prolonged shackling in painful positions, isolation in cells, and even beatings. According to ex-prisoners' accounts, psychological pressure is the most preferred technique used towards Palestinian women by Israeli interrogators. Threats of home demolitions, arrests of family members, forced collaboration, rape or other forms of sexual abuse and harassment are thus a common practice.

Women are often punished individually, in unannounced late night searches of cells, often conducted by male jailers. Sumoud Factsheet states that during these raids Israeli prison guards sometimes cut

¹ <http://mondoweiss.net/2011/03/following-itamar-killings-village-of-awarta-faced-mass-arrests-violence-and-massive-destruction-during-five-days-of-curfew.html>

² <http://occupiedpalestine.wordpress.com/2011/04/08/mass-arrests-of-palestinian-women-by-israel/>

³ <http://www.aljazeera.com/News/2011/March/9%20n/Ban%20Ki-Moon%20Calls%20on%20Israel%20to%20Free%20Thousands%20of%20Palestinian%20Political%20Prisoners,%2010,000%20Palestinian%20Women%20Kidnapped%20Since%201967.htm>

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the electricity, shoot tear gas and shut the windows and attack the prisoners. On March 16, 2002, prison guards entered the women's cells while they were sleeping and took 13 to isolation. They put two in each cell and told them to undress. The women refused, and the prison guards handcuffed them and took off all their clothes. They left the cell doors open as male wardens stood outside.⁴ Due to insufficient and poor quality food given to Palestinian female prisoners by Israeli prison employees, women suffer from loss of weight and hair, general weakness, anemia and iron deficiency. Their diet is not changed or improved when they fall ill, are pregnant or breast-feeding. Poor ventilation, lack of fresh air, moisture and the presence of cockroaches and other insects in the cells contribute to the development of dermatological diseases. Additionally, the lack of movement, the unavailability of sports equipment and a spacious recreation area as well as uncomfortable iron bed frames and only 3 to 5 centimeters thick mattresses cause women back and joint-pains.⁵

Israeli treatment of Palestinian women prisoners is against international humanitarian and human rights law which require among other things:

- supervision of female prisoners by female officers
- due process and fair trial rights
- the right to be informed at the time of arrest of the reasons for arrest and of the charges
- the right to be held in the occupied territories and not in Israel
- the right to accommodation that meets all requirements of health and climatic conditions and minimum floor space, separate bed and clean bedding
- the right to respect for their lives, their dignity, their personal rights and their political, religious and other convictions

"The ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian women and children by Israeli authorities is widespread, systematic and institutionalized. The system operates within a general culture of brutality and impunity and the trial proceedings are a mockery of international law and violate due process principles."⁶ The US government as Israel's strongest supporter is complicit in these crimes.

To find out more:

[Ban Ki-Moon calls for release of Palestinian Political prisoners](#)

To offer support and protection of Palestinian Female Prisoners: go to website of Aseerat, <http://www.aseerat.ps/en-index.php>

Bay Area Women in Black are Jews and allies who stand against militaristic and fundamentalist leadership in all countries, including our own. We wear black as a sign of our mourning for all the lives that have been lost as a result of war, militarization and violence, and particularly those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel and Palestine. As part of the international movement of Women in Black, we seek to transform women's mourning for the dead into a powerful refusal of the inevitability of war.

Join us at the Grand Lake Theater every Saturday at noon to register your protest and your presence as we continue to urge the end of the US military and financial support for Israel's disastrous occupation.

⁴ <http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/downloads/reports/the-condition-of-palestinian-women-and-children-in-israeli-jails.pdf>

⁵ <http://addameer.info/?p=551>

⁶ <http://www.middleeastmonitor.org.uk/downloads/reports/the-condition-of-palestinian-women-and-children-in-israeli-jails.pdf>