



Media Advisory Hunger Strike for Freedom and Dignity

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The Palestinian Prisoners Movement in Brief

The struggle of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails has, for several decades, been a major element of the Palestinian national struggle against the brutality of the Israeli military occupation. Since Israel occupied the Palestinian territory in 1967, a staggering 800,000 Palestinians have been arrested and incarcerated (and a total of 1 million since 1948).

At this moment in time, there are approximately 6,500 Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including 57 women, 300 minors (under the age of 18), and 500 administrative detainees. (Administrative detention is a procedure that allows the Israeli military to hold detainees indefinitely on “secret information” without charging them or allowing them to stand trial.) These numbers also include 13 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, three of whom -Samira Halaykah, Mohammad Al-Til and Ibrahim Dahbour- were arrested as recently as March 2017.

Hunger Strike for Justice

The open hunger strike is one of the only forms of passive resistance and peaceful protest available to Palestinian prisoners against the injustice and oppression of the Israeli military regime. Inspired by the righteousness of their cause, Palestinian prisoners continue to fight for their human rights and the realization of their just demands, which are enshrined in international legislation and conventions, (and listed below).

Since 1967, Palestinians have held 23 coordinated mass hunger strikes, the latest of which took place in 2014 and lasted 63 days. In addition, dozens of hunger strikes have been held by individual prisoners, including Fouad Bisharat, Ra'ed Mteir, Mohammad Al-Qeeq, Jamal Abu Leil, among others. Palestinian prisoners launch hunger strikes as a means to exercise their legal right to protest the punitive measures of the Israeli military authorities and draconian policies of prison administrations.

This open hunger strike is but one step on the long road towards freedom and human dignity. It is a significant and effective means to confront discriminatory laws enacted by the Israeli parliament (Knesset) and the collusion of the unjust Israeli judiciary and military courts that function as arms of the Israeli military authorities.

The open hunger strike of 2017 is being led and engineered by Marwan Al-Barghouti (an imprisoned Member of the Fatah Central Committee), and joined by hundreds of Palestinian detainees, including Kareem Younis and Diya Al-Agha (two of the most prominent leaders of the Palestinian Prisoners' movement).

Legitimate Demands of the Open Hunger Strike

Palestinian prisoners have launched the "empty bowels" strike of 2017 to fulfill their rights and just demands. They are calling for an end to: arbitrary administrative detention, torture, unfair trials, the arrest and detention of children, medical negligence, solitary confinement, degrading treatment and the denial of other human rights, such as visitation rights and the right to education. Many of the violations committed by Israeli authorities are tantamount to war crimes according to International Humanitarian Law and international human rights law.

Official and Public Solidarity with the Prisoners' Hunger Strike

The concept of hunger strike has the political and official support of the international civil and legal community, as well as the support of State Parties to the Geneva Conventions. All means will be invested to exert pressure on Israel to cease its discriminatory racial policies and treat prisoners in conformity with the Geneva Conventions, as well as other aspects of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

In addition to international support, popular activities will be taking place throughout the Palestinian territory. The objectives of these activities are: to call for the unconditional release of the prisoners; to advocate for their rights until such a time that they are released; to support their steadfastness; and to end the impunity of the State of Israel by holding it accountable for its violations of international law.

The Case of Prisoners Coincides with Significant Events in the History of Palestine

The open hunger strike launches on April 17th 2017, the day on which the Palestinian people honor Palestinian Prisoners Day. 2017 also marks three significant historical events relating to the oppression and persecution of the Palestinian people, making this hunger strike even more pertinent: the 100th anniversary of Balfour Declaration; the 70th anniversary of the Nakba (the forced displacement and dispossession of the indigenous people of Palestine); and the 50th anniversary of Israeli colonization of the Palestinian territory since 1967.

This year, as we mark these occasions, the international community is reminded of its moral and political obligation to work towards ending the Israeli military occupation of Palestine once and for all- including the unconditional release of all Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails- while supporting a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees and the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state on the pre-June 1967 border, with East Jerusalem as its capital.