

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

*The urgency of addressing the plight of Palestinian political prisoners
in Israeli prisons and detention facilities*

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PLENARY I

**The current situation and conditions of imprisonment
of Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention facilities**

Paper presented by

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Translated from Arabic

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have come here from Palestine, which has been under criminal occupation for 44 years. During that time, the Israeli occupier has committed the worst crimes against humanity, violating every international instrument. The occupier has killed tens of thousands of our struggling people, most of them defenceless civilians. There have been over 800,000 instances of imprisonment. Tens of thousands of people have been injured, 30 per cent whom have been left with a permanent disability. The occupier has destroyed thousands of homes and uprooted millions of trees. All of this has been done in full view of the world. Allow me refer to another contemporary event, the brutal atrocities of Muammar Al-Qadhafi against the Libyan people. Al-Qadhafi's crimes, which we condemn, are far less numerous than those of the occupation. Yet although the international community has condemned Al-Qadhafi and taken practical steps, it has maintained a culpable and disgraceful silence on the Israeli occupation. It is unclear to me, and probably to many of you, how Al-Qadhafi, who has let loose death squads on the streets of Tripoli, is different from those who have dropped phosphorus bombs onto innocent bystanders in the Gaza Strip, or from the Israeli rabbis who have legitimized the slaughter of Palestinian babies on the grounds that they would grow up to become enemies. In the latter case, the rabbis refused to appear before an investigation ordered by the Public Prosecutor of Israel, only for the State to indulge them by dropping the investigation. This is just one simple illustration of the crimes perpetrated continuously, around the clock, by the heinous Israeli occupation.

Turning to the subject of the men and women detained in the prisons of the occupation, I should like to focus on some salient points.

1. There are currently 6,000 men and women prisoners. Over 800,000 Palestinians have been imprisoned since 1967.
2. The oldest prisoner, Sami Yunus, is 84 and has been imprisoned by the occupation for 29 years. The youngest prisoner, Karim Al-Tamimi, is 11.
3. The longest-serving prisoners are Na'il and Fakhri Barguthi, Akram Mansur and Fu'ad Al-Razim. They have been in prison for over 33 years.
4. There are more than 130 detainees who have spent over 20 years in the prisons of the occupation.
5. Israel is currently imprisoning 37 women, three of whom are under administrative detention.

6. The occupation authorities are detaining over 350 children, defined as persons aged under 18.
7. The occupation authorities are holding over 250 individuals under administrative detention without charge or trial.
8. Of the 6,000 prisoners, over 1,000 suffer from chronic diseases or disabilities requiring constant medical care, including heart disease, blood pressure problems, cancer, kidney failure and motor disabilities. All are subjected to deliberate medical neglect.
9. Since 1967, 201 prisoners have been martyred as a result of torture, gunfire, blows, inhaling gas or deliberate medical neglect. Israel has admitted to giving prisoners drugs that had not been approved for use on humans.
10. The prisoners are held in 27 prisons, one detention centre and one Israeli Army camp. None of these are in compliance with international standards in terms of space allotted to each prisoner, lighting, ventilation and health facilities. Most of the prisons were built in the British Mandate period. Some were closed by Israel based on the recommendations of specialized committees, only to be reopened owing to the need for additional places of detention.
11. The occupation authorities practise torture in a regular, continuous and comprehensive manner. Testimonies which we have documented state that 90 per cent of prisoners are subjected to various degrees of torture. Israel is the only country in the world to have legalized torture.
12. For four years, Israel has completely prevented the families of the 700 prisoners in the Gaza Strip from visiting their children. Thousands of first-degree relatives of other prisoners in the West Bank, and those who live outside Palestine, have been prevented from visiting their children on the grounds that they would constitute a danger to the occupying State. Having violated international law by transferring detainees to prisons within its borders, Israel compounded the injustice by preventing thousands of families from visiting their children.
13. The occupation authorities have withheld the bodies of over 350 martyrs who died in detention, refusing to return them to their families for burial according to their beliefs and traditions.
14. The occupation authorities enforce a policy of collective punishment against the prisoners. For instance, prison blocks and cells are sprayed with asphyxiating gas whose use in enclosed spaces is prohibited. Blocks are raided by groups using truncheons, sticks and police dogs. Unfair fines are imposed. Education is denied: for three years, prisoners have been prevented from taking public secondary school examinations, something that had been allowed for 40 years.
15. One prisoner recruited by the Israeli secret services has confessed that an Israeli officer gave him the task of placing a pill in the teacup of the prisoner Haytham Salihyya in Eshel Prison, Bi'r al-Sab`, in order to assassinate him. The prisoner who collaborated with the

occupation, whose name is known to us, made the confession to lawyers who visited him. Testimonies were provided in the prison block by the perpetrator and the intended victim.

16. Over the last six months, the military courts of the Israeli occupation have enacted a new policy of moving children away from their homes. They approved the release of the 15 year-old child Karam Da`na with the condition that he should not return to his family home, but rather to a different home while awaiting trial. In the same way, the courts struck a bargain with the 14 year-old child Salam Dar Ayyub and his father in order for the child to be removed from the village of Al-Nabi Salih to an apartment in Ramallah.

Through such criminal practices, the occupying State of Israel has become a danger to the humanitarian values which the international community has agreed upon and enshrined in treaties and conventions. We therefore make the following recommendations:

- The issue of prisoners and their unjust treatment should be discussed at a special session of the General Assembly;
- An international fact-finding mission should be convened in order to visit the occupation prisons and observe from close quarters the crimes inflicted on men and women prisoners;
- A medical commission should be convened in order to examine and draw attention to the cases of men and women prisoners, provide assistance and prevail on Israel to offer the necessary medical attention;
- Every available form of pressure should be placed on Israel to free prisoners who are seriously ill and whose life is at risk, enabling them to receive treatment outside prison;
- Israel should be prevailed upon to return the bodies of martyrs, which have been withheld for decades, to their families and loved ones.

The Palestinian Prisoners Society hopes that the United Nations will fulfil its functions effectively, bringing an end to the occupation and allowing the Palestinian people to live in freedom in an independent sovereign State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

(Signed) Qadura Fares
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