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Al-Naqab Prison: Recent Visit Confirms Continued Israeli Abuses of Gaza Detainees Amid International Silence

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24 August 2024

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Gaza, 26 August 2024 — Despite the immense challenges faced by our staff, especially those in Gaza, Al Mezan remains unwavering in its mission to expose and seek accountability for the abuses perpetrated by Israeli forces and authorities against Palestinians in their custody. On 19 August 2024, Al Mezan's lawyer visited Al-Naqab Prison, a detention facility run by the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) located in southern Israel. The conditions witnessed by our lawyer are, to say the least, deeply alarming.

Among the grave human rights violations recorded are the widespread and systematic use of physical and psychological torture and other inhuman and degrading treatment, medical neglect, and starvation policies. This latest visit further confirms what Al Mezan and other Palestinian human rights organizations have been saying for months: the torture and abuse of Gaza prisoners was not isolated to Sde Teiman, but is present in all Israeli prisons and detention centers.

According to one of the detainees met by our lawyer, Israeli authorities are currently holding approximately 600 Palestinian residents of Gaza at Al-Naqab Prison, with some estimates suggesting the number could be as high as 900. As Israel currently detains one of the largest number of Palestinians in its history, nearly all detention facilities operated by the IPS or the Israeli military are severely overcrowded. In Al-Naqab, the overcrowding is particularly severe, with up to 30 Gaza detainees confined to a single tent with only 11 beds available, forcing many to sleep on the floor. The situation is further exacerbated by the dilapidated state of the tents, which offer little protection against extreme summer temperatures.

The detainees visited by our lawyer displayed severe weakness and emaciation, clear signs of their deteriorating health. They showed significant and noticeable weight loss, which can be attributed to an inadequate and substandard diet. The meals provided by Israeli authorities are insufficient both in quantity and in essential nutrients, such as proteins and vitamins, leaving the detainees malnourished and highly susceptible to illness. This is particularly alarming given the ongoing denial of adequate medical care and essential hygiene supplies inside Al-Naqab Prison, which is placing the health and lives of Palestinian detainees at serious risk.

Approximately 150 detainees are currently suffering from a widespread outbreak of skin rashes, exacerbated by the IPS's refusal to provide necessary medical treatment. The situation is further worsened by infestations of insects and worms in the toilets, raw sewage contaminating the tents where detainees are housed, and mold growing on the floors. The absence of

personal hygiene products and hot water has created an environment ripe for disease and epidemics.

Regarding hygienic conditions, detainees reported that the IPS allows them to shower for only three minutes with cold water once a week and deprives them of essential hygiene supplies. The mattresses they sleep on are filthy and inadequate, with the presence of cats in the facility further exacerbating the spread of diseases. Additionally, IPS removes the mattresses every morning at 06:00 and returns them only in the evening. Detainees also noted that their plastic drinking water bottles have not been replaced for approximately four months.

These abuses occur within a legal framework that flagrantly disregards the fundamental principles that form the bedrock of the rule of law, including the right to a fair trial. The Israeli authorities—with the acquiescence of the Israeli justice system—have denied Gaza detainees basic rights, including visits from family members and lawyers. Further, many Palestinian residents of Gaza are detained under the 'Unlawful Combatants Law', which deprives them of basic due process rights. This includes the denial of the right to be informed of the charges or to challenge the evidence presented against them.

Israeli authorities have abused Palestinians in their custody for over ten months now, amid international silence and the absence of accountability. We reaffirm that the abuses of Gaza detainees by Israeli authorities constitute part of a broader pattern of behavior that aligns with the crime of genocide. Throughout their abduction and detention, Palestinian residents of Gaza are treated as 'human animals', demonstrating that the dehumanizing and genocidal rhetoric employed by the highest levels of the Israeli leadership to characterize Palestinians as a group was embraced throughout all ranks within the military and the IPS.

We recall Article II(b) of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which lists "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" as a genocidal act. Israel's systematic targeting of Palestinian residents of Gaza through physical and psychological abuse fits

this definition and should be investigated as a genocidal act by relevant accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the UN Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.

Unless stopped and held accountable, Israeli authorities will persist in their genocidal abuses against Palestinian prisoners and detainees. The continued lack of accountability enjoyed by Israeli authorities not only perpetuates these abuses, but also undermines the rule of international law and the very foundations of the global system of human rights protection. It is imperative that immediate action is taken to address these violations, ensure accountability and safeguard the fundamental rights and dignity of all Palestinians in Israeli custody and detention.

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