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Israel's escalating use of torture against Palestinians in custody a preventable crime against humanity: UN experts

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GENEVA – Reports of alleged torture and sexual violence in Israel's Sde Teiman prison are grossly illegal and revolting, but they only represent the tip of the iceberg, independent human rights experts* warned today.

"Israel's widespread and systemic abuse of Palestinians in detention and arbitrary arrest practices over decades, coupled with the absence of any restraints by the Israeli State since 7 October 2023, paint a shocking picture enabled by absolute impunity," the experts said.

Around 9,500 Palestinians, including hundreds of children and women, are currently imprisoned—around one-third without charge or trial. Another unknown number are arbitrarily being held in detention facilities and ad hoc camps following a wave of arrest and abduction campaigns across Palestinian territory that targeted men, women and children particularly following 7 October.

The experts received substantiated reports of widespread abuse, torture, sexual assault and rape, amid atrocious inhumane conditions, with at least 53 Palestinians apparently dying as a result in 10 months.

Countless testimonies by men and women speak of detainees in cage-like enclosures, tied to beds blindfolded and in diapers, stripped naked, deprived of adequate healthcare, food, water and sleep, electrocutions including on their genitals, blackmail and cigarette burns. In addition, victims spoke of loud music played until their ears bled, attacks by dogs, waterboarding, suspension from ceilings and severe sexual and gender-based violence.

"Allegations of gang-rape of a Palestinian detainee, now shockingly supported by voices in the Israeli political establishment and society, provide irrefutable evidence that the moral compass is lost," the experts said. In February 2024, a number of experts also **expressed** grave concern regarding the reports of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence committed against Palestinian women and girls in Israeli detention.

The Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territory **investigated** Israel's detention practices in 2023 and called on UN Member States to

intervene and the International Criminal Court to promptly investigate what appeared to be a consolidated crime against humanity. The experts regret this call was not heeded.

"Torture practices are irredeemably unlawful and constitute international crimes, yet form part of the modus operandi of Israel's notorious detention and torture system," they warned. "These practices are intended to punish Palestinians for resisting occupation and seek to destroy them individually and collectively."

"Israel's genocidal destruction in Gaza, which is spreading across the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, serves as the backdrop to its abusive detention programme today," the experts said.

"Most Palestinian detainees are de facto hostages of an unlawful occupation," they said, referring to the **July 2024 Advisory Opinion** from the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. They called for oversight and accountability over all Israeli practices and policies in the territory.

"Decrying the silence by Member States following the emergence of testimonies and reports of alleged maltreatment and torture, the experts called for pressure on Israel with a view to implementing a cogent system of access, monitoring and protection of Palestinian detainees. The Human Rights Council, in particular, must urgently demand the deployment of special procedures mandate holders and the Commission of Inquiry to facilities holding Palestinians, they said.

"What is required now is nothing short of an independent, international presence of human rights observers. They must become the world's eyes in light of Israel's brazen failure to prevent and address the heinous rights violations against prisoners and detainees," the experts said.

The experts: Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967; Tlaleng Mofokeng, Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences; George Katrougalos, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order; Laura Nyirinkindi (Chair), Claudia Flores (Vice-Chair), Dorothy Estrada Tanck, Ivana Krstić, and Haina Lu; Working group on discrimination against women and girls

The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the **Special Procedures** of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

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