

## **Palestinian Political Prisoners Subject to Collective Punishment as Mass Hunger Strike Continues**

Joint Call for Action  
3 May 2012

As organisations dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), the Palestinian Council of Human Rights Organisations (PCHRO) is gravely concerned about the series of collective and punitive measures taken by the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) against Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons currently engaged in a mass hunger strike. These measures include solitary confinement, daily fines of up to 500 NIS (€100), confiscation of salt for water, the denial of electricity supply and random cell and body searches.

Also of utmost concern are the lives of Bilal Diab and Thaer Halahleh, who today began their 66th day of hunger strike. Both men are in critical condition and have been denied access to independent doctors for the majority of their hunger strike. Thaer noted that they have been subjected to significant pressure by prison doctors and the prison administration to break their hunger strike, but they are determined to continue with the strike until they are released. No decision was made in today's Israeli High Court hearing regarding their administrative detention orders. Both Bilal and Thaer were brought to the hearing and attended in wheelchairs. During the hearing, Bilal fainted and there were no doctors present inside the court. Thaer testified to the mistreatment he has suffered since his arrest. Judge Amnon Rubenstein announced that the panel of judges would make a decision after reviewing the "secret file", but after the review stated that the parties would be informed at a later time, without specifying when.

On 17 April 2012, Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons launched a mass hunger strike demanding an end to administrative detention, isolation and other punitive measures taken against Palestinian prisoners including the denial of family and lawyer visits, especially to prisoners from the Gaza Strip who have been denied family visits since 2007, and access to university education. The campaign has steadily gained momentum over the past two weeks and an estimated 2,500 prisoners are now on an open-ended hunger strike.

Since the beginning of the hunger strike, the Israeli Prison Service (IPS) has collectively punished participating prisoners using a wide range of tactics. Most recent updates indicate that some prisoners are being fined between 250 (€50) and 500 (€100) shekels for each day of their hunger strike. In Naqab prison, prisoners are experiencing daily inspections of random sections, which last for approximately 40 to 50 minutes. These inspections include cell and body searches. In addition, prisoners are no longer permitted to leave their rooms for the daily break period.

Many hunger strikers have been transferred to different prisons or to special sections within prisons, in an attempt to further isolate them from the growing movement and the outside

world. The latest transfers include the movement of prisoners between Megiddo prison, Shatta prison and a special section of Gilboa prison. At least three leaders of the campaign have been placed in solitary confinement in Beersheba, in addition to many others who were placed in solitary confinement upon the announcement of their hunger strikes. Ninety-six hunger strikers have been transferred to Ohalei Keidar prison, where they have been placed two prisoners to each solitary confinement cell.

Lawyers attempting to visit hunger striking prisoners have also been prevented from doing so, with prison administrations banning certain lawyers outright, claiming visits were not properly arranged, or declaring “situations of emergency” right before or during scheduled and pre-approved visits. On 29 April, a lawyer from Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association was told that his visit to Ashkelon prison was not approved, even though it had been confirmed the previous day. Another lawyer was only allowed to visit Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Secretary General Ahmad Sa’adat, who was moved to Ramleh prison medical center on 27 April, for a period of ten minutes on 30 April, and was refused a visit the following day.

Six other Palestinian prisoners remain on extended hunger strike, including Hassan Safadi, who today began his 60th day, and Omar Abu Shalal, who is on his 58th day today. Jaafar Azzedine, currently on his 43rd day of hunger strike, reported that he is suffering from consistent dizziness, which caused him to injure his head last week after fainting. These men are all being denied access to independent doctors and lawyers, despite their rapidly deteriorating health conditions, as Israeli authorities continue to violate their human rights, in particular their right to health.

In the context of the mass hunger strike of Palestinian political prisoners, the PCHRO:

- calls on the European Union, in particular the EU Parliament, the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross to immediately intervene with Israel in order to save the lives of Bilal Diab and Thaer Halahleh and demand that they be released from administrative detention;
- demands that all hunger strikers have unrestricted access to independent doctors and adequate medical care;
- demands that the Member States of the United Nations urgently put pressure on Israel to end its policy of arbitrary detention and to abide by the standard rules for the treatment of prisoners adopted in 1955, which set out what is generally accepted as being good principle and practice in the treatment of prisoners;
- calls on the European Parliament to dispatch a parliamentary fact-finding mission that includes members of its Subcommittee on Human Rights to investigate the conditions of detention of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

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