

Addameer Commemorates International Women's Day by Shedding Light on the 29 Palestinian Women Prisoners Languishing in Harsh and Degrading Conditions in Damon Israeli Occupation Prison

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On 8 March 2023, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association commemorates International Women's Day by shedding light on Palestinian female prisoners languishing in extremely harsh and degrading conditions in Damon Israeli occupation prison. Over the years, the Israeli settler-colonial and apartheid regime has not spared Palestinian women from their systematic policies of arbitrary arrest, torture, and ill-treatment during interrogation and detention, dehumanizing conditions of confinement, and practices of deliberate medical neglect and isolation.



There are currently 29 Palestinian female prisoners in Damon prison—constructed initially as a complex on Mount Carmel in Haifa during the British Mandate to be used as a tobacco storehouse and a stable. Among the 29 prisoners are six mothers, two girls under 18, seven women suffering from wounds sustained during their violent arrest, and 15 women diagnosed with chronic and/or mental health illnesses. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to subject Palestinian women to high prison sentences. Eight Palestinian women are sentenced to 10 years and above, including prisoners Shorouq Dweiyat and Shatila Abu Ayad—each sentenced to 16 years of imprisonment. Further, the Israeli occupation authorities hold one woman under administrative detention without charges or a trial. 13 more are detained awaiting trial before Israeli military courts that lack any fair trial guarantees and are an integral part of Israel's institutionalized racial domination and oppression of the Palestinian people.

The Case of Palestinian girl (R) and Systematic Torture and Ill-Treatment

Palestinian female prisoners, like Palestinian male prisoners, are subjected to systematic torture and ill-treatment during interrogation to extract confessions and later convict them in military

courts that rarely dismiss testimonies taken under duress. Female detainees are also subjected to psychological torture, extortion, and threats, especially the mother detainees, who are regularly threatened with the arrest of their children.

A critical case to highlight in this regard is the Palestinian girl (R) arrested at a military checkpoint beginning of the year 2023. At the military checkpoint near her home in the old city of Hebron, (R) refused to allow an Israeli military soldier to search her bag. Consequently, a large number of military soldiers attacked her and began to physically assault her with batons to the point of knocking (R) to the ground as the military soldiers continued their beatings. Then the Israeli occupation forces handcuffed (R) with iron handcuffs and took her to a room near the military checkpoint, where Israeli female military soldiers slapped her on the face, hit her head against the wall, and took videos with their mobile phones, mocking and laughing at her while she was bleeding from her nose and mouth. They also removed her headscarf while filming. After several hours, the child was transferred to a doctor who did not speak Arabic, and no interpreter was present. The Israeli doctor only examined her blood pressure and did not ask (R) anything about her health condition—completely ignoring her injuries and open wounds on her face and body.

(R) was then taken for interrogation before being subjected to a thorough body search by Israeli military officers and waiting an hour alone in the interrogation room. The interrogation lasted for prolonged hours; meanwhile, (R) was cuffed by her hands and feet to the interrogation chair. No female interrogator was present, violating international law and Israeli law. During the interrogation, the Israeli interrogators constantly shouted at (R) and threatened to demolish her family home house and arrest her family members. The girl asked several times to go to the bathroom, but the interrogator refused. After the interrogation, she was transferred to Hasharon Prison, where she was held for five days under challenging conditions. Only one meal was brought to her throughout the day, served in the afternoon, and she was prohibited from using the showers before being transferred to Damon Prison.

The Death of Sa'deyeh Farjallah and the Policy of Deliberate Medical Neglect

On 2 July 2022, Palestinian woman prisoner Sa'deyeh Farjallah (64), who was arrested in December 2021, passed away inside Damon Israeli occupation prison due to the Israeli Prison

Services' systematic and deliberate policy of medical neglect. Sa'deyeh was previously diagnosed with high blood pressure and diabetes. Weeks before her passing, Sa'deyeh had begun to suffer from general fatigue and emaciation and could not walk on her own. After pressure from Palestinian women prisoners, the IPS transferred Sa'deyeh to the prison clinic—only for the medical staff there to report that she did not suffer from any pain according to the initial medical examination. They further alleged that Sa'deyeh was faking her pain to be released.

To add more brutality to her suffering, for Sa'deyeh's last military court hearing, the Israeli occupation authorities refused to hold the session via video conference, forcing Sa'deyeh to be transferred to Ofer military court through the harrowing journey of the *bosta*,¹ where she was pulled on a wheelchair into the hearing session.

Prison Raids and Harsher Detention Conditions

The year 2023 for Palestinian female prisoners began with the Israeli Prison Services in Damon Prison implementing punitive measures and violent prison raids, which serve as a method of collective punishment and further give way to a host of abuses and human rights violations. During Addameer's visit to Damon Prison on 19 January 2023, Palestinian female prisoners reported noticeable administrative changes regarding Israeli prison guards, security, and intelligence officers in Damon Prison. For example, the daily cell inspection that female prison guards previously carried out is currently being implemented by female prison guards accompanied by male prison guards. Notably, the IPS in Damon prison has recently banned the entry of medical glasses under the pretext that they contain iron. Further, there have been no developments to date concerning allowing children under six years of age to visit Damon prison and be in close physical

¹ “*Bosta*” transfers are described by Palestinians as a brutal trip in hell. The prisoners and detainees are subject to extensive, repeated dehumanizing searches before each stop, while being cuffed in both their hands and feet. “*Bosta*” is a vehicle cell made out of metal with narrow double seats and disproportionate measurements, forcing prisoners into an angled seating position for lack of appropriate space. Palestinian prisoners and detainees face degrading conditions during transport, as well as, physical strain. The van has an air condition that is extremely cold and no ventilation. A trip could take up to 10-15 hours in that position.

contact with their mothers without any obstructions or barriers— preventing children from embracing their mothers.²

Moreover, on 29 January 2023, "Yanmaz" Israeli Special Units raided room 3 in the women's section in Damon prison. The Israeli Special Units claimed they found a threatening letter from one of the women prisoners. Hence, Israeli Special Units immediately raided all the women's section using tasers and other violent means; confiscating all electronic equipment and completely shutting down the section for five days; isolating the female prisoners from the outside world; and further banning them from family visits and public phones for one month. Following the raid, four Palestinian women prisoners were placed in solitary confinement in Damon Prison for seven days after being physically assaulted. The women prisoners' representative was transferred to solitary confinement in Neve Tirza prison³ until 7 February 2023.

Conclusion

On this International Women's Day, Addameer advocates for an abolitionist and feminist analysis of the Israeli carceral regime that recognizes the complex intersections between settler-colonialism, state violence, and patriarchy, as Angela Davis and her colleagues write in *Abolition. Feminism. Now*, "the movement to end gender and sexual violence, for example, can never be isolated from the work to end state violence, including the violence of policing... working in coalition forces us to look for both the obvious and the nonobvious relationships of domination, and, as we have done this, we have come to see that no form of subordination ever stands alone."⁴⁵

In addition to the direct forms of oppression Palestinian women experience in Israeli occupation prisons, Palestinian women bear the emotional, financial, and physical burdens of having a male family member incarcerated. The true extent of the hardship experienced by women as a result of

² Addameer, "Restrictions on Family Visits", July 2017, available at: https://www.addameer.org/key_issues/family_visit

³ OMCT, "Israel: Violence against Female Prisoners in Neve Tirza Prison in Ramleh", 14 July 2003, available at: <https://www.omct.org/en/resources/urgent-interventions/israel-violence-against-female-prisoners-in-neve-tirza-prison-in-ramle>

⁴ Davis, A. Y., Dent, G., Meiners, E. R., & Richie, B. E. (2022). *Abolition. Feminism. Now* (Vol. 2). Haymarket Books.

⁵ Matsuda, M. J. (1990). *Beside my sister, facing the enemy: Legal theory out of coalition*. *Stan. L. Rev.*, 43, 1183.

Israeli practices of arbitrary arrest, torture, deliberate medical neglect, and inhumane conditions of confinement thus cannot be measured.

Further, addressing the patriarchal and misogynistic forms of violence experienced by Palestinian women outside Israeli prisons in their home communities is crucial in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination. While Addameer firmly places Israeli settler colonialism in the center of our analysis for liberation, we recognize that for all people to be free, we cannot subordinate one aspect of oppression to another. In this way, the fight for liberation against the Israeli settler-colonial and apartheid regime must simultaneously be the fight against patriarchy and against intimate partner violence. None of us are free until all of us are free.