

Urgent Call for Independent Investigation Amidst Persistent Reports of Torture, Enforced Disappearance, and Another Palestinian “Death” in Israeli Custody

Thursday 18 January 2024, by [Al Mezan](#), [Al-Haq](#), [Palestinian Centre for Human Rights](#) (Date first published: 4 January 2024).

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), Al Mezan and Al-Haq, express deep concern over the “death” of Palestinian prisoner Abdul-Rahman Bassem Al-Bahsh on Monday, 1 January 2024, while in Israeli custody at Megiddo prison. Al-Bahsh, a 23-year-old resident of the Old City of Nablus, is the seventh Palestinian prisoner or detainee to “die” in Israeli prisons in less than three months. Reports and evidence about the torture and ill-treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons have been on the rise since 7 October 2023, underscoring the urgent need for independent investigations, including by the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.



Al-Bahsh’s death was announced by the Palestinian Commission of Detainees Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners’ Club on Monday, 1 January 2024. The Israeli Prison Service (IPS) merely reported the death of a “security detainee” in Megiddo prison, and that the circumstances surrounding his death would be reviewed. Al-Bahsh family confirmed that he did not suffer from any significant illnesses and only sporadically expressed complaints of ear pain.

Al-Bahsh, who had been detained since 31 May 2022 and sentenced to 35 months in prison, is the first Palestinian to die in Israeli detention in 2024 and the seventh among those officially announced to have died in Israeli prisons since 7 October 2023, which includes two Gaza workers. Al-Bahsh’s death is not the first occurrence within Megiddo prison. Our organisations have obtained information detailing recent occurrences of torture and brutal assaults against Palestinian detainees in that facility. One such tragic incident involved the detainee Abdul-Rahman Ahmed Marei, a 33-year-old resident of Qarawat Bani Hassan town in Salfit, whose ‘death’ was announced on 13 November 2023 after being beaten by Israeli prison guards. In addition to the seven announced deaths of Palestinians prisoners and detainees since 7 October 2023, there are also concerns of further deaths among Palestinian detainees held in the “Sdeh Teiman” camp in Beer Al-Seba’, where, according to testimonies from released detainees, hundreds of Gaza residents are held

incommunicado and treated with cruelty and violence by Israeli guards.

Our organisations received testimonies from recently released detainees, attesting to the escalating incidents of torture by Israeli authorities against Palestinian prisoners and detainees throughout the stages of arrest, detention, and interrogation. This disturbing trend is particularly evident among hundreds of detainees in Gaza who were apprehended during the Israeli ground invasion or the coerced displacement of Palestinians from northern Gaza to the south. These testimonies include:

Jihad Abdelhamid Zaqout, 75, resident of Gaza:

“I was arrested by Israeli soldiers from my home in Gaza on 12 December 2023. They physically assaulted me, restrained my hands with handcuffs, and subsequently moved me to an adjacent unoccupied house. I remained under supervision until 9:30 PM, until they had completed their operations in the area, demolishing it with bulldozers and shells. After blindfolding me, they transported me in a military jeep for about an hour and a half. I was accompanied by other detainees whom I did not know. Throughout the journey, soldiers subjected us to physical assault, striking our head with the butts of their rifles and using their hands.

Upon arrival at a camp resembling a playground, housing 500 detainees, we were stripped of our clothes, our money was confiscated, and our IDs were taken. They made us wear very thin grey pyjamas. We spent three days without any cover or mattress, then they brought us very thin blankets and mattresses. Throughout my stay, we were allowed to use the bathroom only once every two days, facing difficulty with our hands tied and eyes blindfolded. Among the detainees were individuals who were sick, disabled, and injured. The injured individuals were deliberately beaten at the areas of their injury, leading to some people losing their consciousness multiple times”.

Khamis Ali Rabie Al-Bordini, 55, resident of Al-Zaytoun neighbourhood in Gaza:

“I was arrested by the Israeli occupying forces on 1 December 2023, after they had demolished my home while I was inside along with my family. After they had demolished the house, we went outside carrying a white flag. Israeli occupying forces immediately arrested the men: myself and my sons, Husam 32 years, Tamer 28 years, and my son-in-law Mohammad Abu Afesh 26 years. They forced us to strip and stay in our underwear and handcuffed our hands behind our back with plastic stripes and blindfolded us. We were violently assaulted and kicked with everything the soldiers had on them throughout our wake and transport in vehicles. Most of us sustained injuries from the beating and kicking. For three days, and in a place unknown to us were assaulted while naked, and our arms tied and blindfolded. Sometimes, the soldiers would toss detainees from vehicles as if they were sacks. We were not given water or food, going to the bathrooms was denied, and the soldiers forced us to sit on our knees. Some detainees wished they were dead than having to endure this torture. After three days, they transported us to another detention camp unknown to us, and we were given grey-coloured pyjamas. Each 100 detainees were put in tin structures surrounded by barbed wire. Throughout our detention we had our hands tied to the front, blindfolded and seated on our knees. I was questioned by an interrogator twice, and whenever he didn't like my answers, he would force me to sit on my knees, bearing in mind that the floors were from gravel. I used to hear the voices of other detainees screaming when being questioned. In this detention area, we were given very little food, that would be a small yoghurt and two pieces of bread, for lunch it was one can of sardines, and jam for dinner. Most of us wouldn't eat much to avoid needing to go to the toilet”.

Samir Mahmoud Ibrahim Abu Sharkh, 43, resident of Beit Lahiya, northern Gaza:

“The Israeli occupying forces arrested me on 6 December 2023 after they had called on the residents of our neighbourhoods through loudspeakers to leave their homes and head to the streets

while raising their hands. They then demanded men between 15 and 60 years old to take off their clothes and stay in their underwear, and asked us to sit on the ground in a long line on the street. Soldiers were all around us pointing their rifles at us, shouting and insulting us with obscene words, they told us that we deserve to be executed like human animals. We were then blindfolded, our hands were tied to the back, and then our feet were tied and we stayed where we were for hours. We were extremely exhausted, then trucks came and they had us transported in a painful way. The soldiers would intentionally insult us and pile us up on top of each other. We were assaulted by soldiers as they loaded us into the trucks. The trucks moved on dirt roads that were bulldozed by the Israeli army until we reached an area close to the seashore, I could hear the sea waves. We were forced off the trucks into a sandy area, they assaulted us with the rifle butts, slapped us, and kicked us with their feet. They beat me up all over my body, especially my legs, head and chest. It was very cold, especially when we were naked. Later, I was transferred alongside others to an area with gravel on the ground. The soldiers had us sit there, and beat us in the same way there. Later, I was transferred to a caravan that had a commander and a military doctor, they took photos of me, and I was transferred with others in a jeep. Along the way, the soldiers would beat us and insult us. The soldiers would put out their cigarettes on my body, especially my legs. The military vehicles moved with us inside for three hours nonstop, and we arrived in an area with a large caravan. There I was given a thin mattress and a blanket and we were forced to sit on these mattresses for four consecutive days and we were given a piece of bread and a cucumber, and another meal consisted of a small piece of bread and cheese, and another of bread and a tomato. We were not allowed to go to the bathroom except once per day, and only after insistence from detainees. The soldiers would give us one drink of water throughout the entire period. I saw several detainees being beaten up, one of the elderly detainees with us was shivering from the cold and when other detainees tried to help him, they were punished and tied to the fence outside for several hours. The soldiers would demand of us to stand in line several times a day, especially at night”.

Our lawyers have made efforts to obtain information from Israeli authorities about Gaza detainees. However, Israeli authorities have consistently refused to disclose any details about them or about the conditions, locations, and grounds of detention. This conduct is tantamount to enforced disappearance that, if committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against a civilian population, constitutes a crime against humanity.

PCHR, Al Mezan, and Al-Haq jointly call for an independent investigation into the recent “deaths” of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. There are serious suspicions that the majority of these deaths resulted from torture, ill-treatment, and extrajudicial executions. With Israeli prison guards continuing to assault and mistreat Palestinian detainees without adequate oversight or accountability and under the directives of the Israeli government, particularly the Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, the thousands of Palestinian prisoners and detainees currently held in Israeli detention face significant risks. Indeed, our organisations hold Israeli authorities responsible for the well-being of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons, and express grave concern for the lives of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners who may be at risk of death due to the persistent policies of torture and medical neglect by the IPS.

We also reaffirm the urgent need to end the enforced disappearance of hundreds of Palestinian detainees, including dozens of women from Gaza, by promptly disclosing their names and whereabouts. We further call for an immediate cessation of Israeli policies of torture and ill-treatment during arbitrary detention. In addition, we urgently appeal to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to enhance its role in monitoring the conditions of detention of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons.

We urge the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, along with the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions

and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, to publicly address these grave violations and initiate a prompt investigation.

We further call on the international community to compel Israel to respect the rules of international law and humanitarian law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention, and to adhere to the Minimum Standards Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), Al Mezan and Al-Haq

P.S.

• Al-Haq. 04 Jan 2024

<https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/22468.html>