

## Inside Israel's torture, rape, and dehumanization centers

Shocking even by Israeli standards, the horrifying truth of the occupation's systematic torture, rape, and degradation of Palestinian detainees reveals a brutality buried in silence.

By Robert Inlakesh

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While the world witnesses the atrocities and [massacres](#) committed by Israel's military assault on Gaza every day, the thousands of Palestinians detained by occupation forces – before and after the events of 7 October 2023 – face torture and death behind closed doors, alone.

Worse yet, these detention horrors have been brazenly publicized and even [bragged](#) about by occupation soldiers, with violent, [vocalized support](#) from wide swathes of Israeli society.

In the shadows of Israel's prisons, tens of thousands of Palestinian detainees are enduring a relentless campaign of cruelty. Reports detail harrowing accounts of beatings, [gang rape](#), and psychological torture, compounded by the denial of essential needs such as food, water, and medical care.

This systematic abuse, carried out on an industrial scale, is staggering in its scope and savagery. Public protests have emerged – not to condemn these atrocities – but to [demand the release](#) of Israeli soldiers implicated in acts of sexual violence so severe that their victim tragically died from the injuries inflicted.

### Secrecy and suffering inside Israeli prisons

Ronen Bar, the head of Israel's Shin Bet security agency, issued a dire warning to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in June, [describing](#) the situation in Israeli prisons as a “ticking time bomb,” which may endanger senior Israelis abroad and expose them to “international tribunals.”

Bar's letter revealed that over 21,000 Palestinian detainees were being held, far exceeding official figures and the capacity of the centers.

Rather than addressing these concerns, Israel's extremist Security Minister, Itamar Ben Gvir, who has barred Red Cross and humanitarian access to Palestinian detainees, responded by [boasting](#) about his role in worsening conditions for prisoners.

A [policy paper](#) from the Institute for Palestine Studies highlighted the draconian measures implemented as early as 17 October – a mere 10 days after the launch of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. These measures included:

Constricting living spaces; removing detainees' beds when necessary and replacing them with mattresses on the floor, leading to overcrowding; a policy of 'closures' whereby prison cells are locked, and total isolation is imposed; closing prisons to all family visits or visits by the Red Cross or by lawyers, and rescinding the possibility of bringing detainees before judges so that all judicial sessions are conducted through video conference.

The situation under the security minister has deteriorated to the point where Ben Gvir has [openly called](#) for the execution of Palestinian detainees, which he offers up as a "simpler solution." Since 7 October, at least [35 Palestinian prisoners](#) have died in Israeli jails and military detention camps.

### **Reports of rape and abuse despite censorship**

While many details remain obscure, evidence from court documents, eyewitness testimonies, and leaked photos and videos paint a harrowing picture of the conditions inside these facilities.

One particularly disturbing case is that of Bassem Tamimi, a resident of Nabi Saleh in the West Bank, who was released from administrative detention – a form of imprisonment without charge – physically emaciated and emotionally broken.

Even Israeli news outlet [Haaretz](#) had its report on Tamimi's treatment redacted by authorities in an attempt to conceal the breadth of prison brutality.

In January, a joint report published by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) detailed what it called "systemic" torture of Palestinians. One testimony presented in the report, from a detainee called "Prisoner R" held in Ketziot Prison, revealed the following [details](#):

The wardens would threaten to kill the prisoners as they entered the cells ... Wardens would conduct searches while the prisoners were naked, place naked prisoners against each other, and place the aluminum device used in the searches in their buttocks. In another instance, the wardens passed a card in a prisoner's buttocks. All of this took place in sight of other prisoners and wardens, while the wardens took pleasure in beating the prisoner's genitals.

After a prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas in late November, claims began to emerge of severe torture and rape – testimonies that largely fell on deaf ears. On 1 December, Baraah Abo Ramouz, a Palestinian journalist just released from prison, [told the press that](#):

The situation in the prisons is devastating. The prisoners are abused. They are being constantly beaten. They're being sexually assaulted. They are being raped. I'm not exaggerating. The prisoners are being raped.

### **Gender-based violence as collective punishment**

Upon exiting the prisons, many Palestinian detainees opted to remain silent on their experiences inside Israeli detention facilities due to fears of retribution but also out of a deep sense of shame and the need to preserve their honor in a conservative society.

At the time, the Israeli security minister directed Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai to [crack down](#) on any celebrations by families of the released prisoners. As Ben Gvir publicly stated:

My instructions are clear: there are to be no expressions of joy ... Expressions of joy are equivalent to backing terrorism; victory celebrations give backing to those human scum.

A [UN report](#) released on 12 June almost entirely focuses on cases of sexual abuse and rape committed against Palestinian men, women, and children while under detention. Israeli forces, the report says:

Systematically targeted and subjected Palestinians to SGBV [Sexual and Gender-Based Violence] online and in person since October 7, including through forced public nudity, forced public stripping, sexualized torture and abuse, and sexual humiliation and harassment.

The report further states that gender-based violence “directed at Palestinian women was intended to humiliate and degrade the Palestinian population as a whole.” The men and young boys were stripped and paraded through the streets, and the women were forced to watch as the kidnapped, cuffed, and blindfolded captives were “coerced to do physical movements while naked.”

In Gaza, not only are random Palestinian civilians rounded up and subjected to public degradation, but many are then transferred to Israeli detention centers, without charges, to suffer torture and even death.

According to eyewitness testimonies collected by the Palestinian Prisoners Club (PPC) in July, four blindfolded detainees held without any charge were [summarily executed](#) in front of other inmates at the Kerem Abu Shalom site located along the perimeter of Gaza.

### **Palestine's Abu Ghraib**

Perhaps the most infamous cases of abuse, torture, and rape against Palestinian detainees have emerged from the [Sde Teiman](#) detention center, a facility located at an Israeli military site in the Naqab (Negev) desert that is specifically designed for people abducted from Gaza.

Per an amendment to Israeli law back in December, the military is permitted to hold ‘suspected terrorists’ for up to 45 days without charge before transferring them to the Israeli Prison System (IPS). Many of the Palestinian abductees, however, were held for much longer using loopholes in Israel’s legal and prison system.

Despite countless leaked reports on the conditions faced by detained Gazans, including women, children, doctors, people with disabilities, and the elderly, the first real expose that broke through the English-language mainstream media barrier was an investigative piece published by [CNN](#) in May.

The US outlet leaked photos of prisoners kept bound, blindfolded, and held behind barbed wire fences in stress positions, and quoted Israeli whistleblowers who worked in the facility.

The testimonies attested to the horrifying sanitary conditions and routine torture practiced there, which one Israeli whistleblower said had “stripped them down of anything that resembles human beings.”

Later, the *New York Times* went on to publish its own [three-month-long investigation](#) into the Sde Teiman facility, confirming three cases of electrocution, two cases of prisoners having their ribs broken during arbitrary beatings, and heinous crimes such as the anal rape of detainees.

It also detailed how prisoners were humiliated and forced to wear only diapers during interrogations. Corroborating the investigative piece’s evidence, a leaked segment of a UN report on the facility quoted prisoners directly, revealing stomach-churning details.

### **‘We saw worms coming out of his body’**

In testimony collected by [UNRWA](#), a 41-year-old former detainee said:

They made me sit on something like a hot metal stick, and it felt like fire – I have burns [in the anus]. The soldiers hit me with their shoes on my chest and used something like a metal stick that had a small nail on the side ... They asked us to drink from the toilet and made the dogs attack us ... There were people who were detained and killed – maybe nine of them. One of them died after they put the electric stick up his [anus]. He got so sick; we saw worms coming out of his body, and then he died.

A woman in her thirties also testified to being shown the aerial view of her neighborhood and threatened with the bombing of family members. While another 32-year-old woman described her harrowing experience while being transferred between different detention facilities:

They asked the soldiers to spit on me, saying, ‘She is a b\*\*\*\*, she is from Gaza.’ They were beating us as we moved and saying they would put pepper on our sensitive parts [genitals]. They pulled us, beat us, they took us on the bus to the Damon prison after five days. A male soldier took off our hijabs, and they pinched us and touched our bodies, including our breasts. We were blindfolded, and we felt them touching

us, pushing our heads to the bus. We started to squeeze together to try to protect ourselves from the touching. They said ‘b\*\*\*\*, b\*\*\*\*.’ They told the soldiers to take off their shoes and slap our faces with them.

### **Dehumanization of Palestinian prisoners**

Confirming previous reports on the issue, *Haaretz* also published a piece on the [amputation of prisoners’ limbs](#) by unqualified individuals, which was performed due to the extended periods detainees were shackled, leaving their circulation-deprived flesh to rot and get infected.

A 32-year-old Gazan man, speaking to *The Cradle* on the condition of anonymity, says Israeli guards “beat me repeatedly and then urinated on me” while held at Sde Teiman detention center. He testifies to being severely tortured, too.

“There were even doctors there, disabled people and young people, but they didn’t care who you were; we were all treated below animals,” he says, explaining that sounds were constantly played to disrupt sleep and make it impossible to tell what time it was.

He goes on to say that he was beaten with metal tools and that the prison guards would mock him and threaten to kill the rest of his family, with full knowledge that his brother had been murdered in a previous series of Israeli airstrikes prior to his abduction, and using the information to torment him mentally.

The director of Al-Shifa Medical Complex in Gaza City, Dr Mohammad Abu Salmiya, who was released after spending seven months in Israeli detention without any charge, [testified to what he witnessed](#) after being ferried through a range of detention facilities, including Sde Teiman.

Dr Abu Salmiya stated that “prisoners in Israeli jails endure different types of torture. The army treats them as if they were inanimate objects, and Israeli doctors physically assaulted us.”

He went on to say that there were “severe torture and almost daily assaults inside the prisons and were denied medical treatments,” adding that “no international organization visited us in Israeli prisons, and we were prohibited from meeting any lawyers. Many detainees are still left behind in very poor health and psychological conditions.”

### **Showers come with severe punishments**

Beyond the countless makeshift detention facilities hastily erected inside Gaza – where prisoners were stripped, blindfolded, and left in the sand to endure harsh weather conditions – there are three official detention centers specifically for Palestinians from Gaza, surrounding the besieged coastal territory.

Palestinian lawyer with Israeli citizenship, Khaled Mahajneh, provided an insightful first-hand account of the conditions faced in the Sde Teiman detention camp after being granted a rare visit, [stating that](#) “the treatment is more horrifying than anything we have heard about Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.”

Mahajneh recounted the testimony of one prisoner, who revealed that the only time shackles were removed was during a weekly one-minute shower. But Palestinian detainees began refusing these showers because exceeding the one-minute limit, without a timer to guide them, resulted in “severe punishments, including hours outside in the heat or rain.”

After months of mounting evidence on the deadly conditions faced at Sde Teiman, 10 Israeli reservist soldiers were accused of gang-raping a Palestinian prisoner with a stick. Nine of the accused were arrested, one of whom would be released the next day and go on to brag about his actions on Israeli television.

The arrests, however, triggered [the invasion of military facilities](#) by thousands of Israeli protesters, backed by Ben Gvir, who lionized the rapists as “[heroes](#).” A debate on the incident even followed in the Israeli Knesset, where Likud Party MK Hanoch Milwidsky [argued](#) in favor of the gang rape.

Since then, a video of the assault has surfaced, and Israel’s Honenu legal aid organization, representing four of the accused, has [claimed](#) their clients were acting in “self-defense.”

### **It’s not just one facility**

At a press conference held in the West Bank city of Ramallah in mid-July, Mahajneh also [revealed](#) that he had learned, during a visit to the Ofer detention center located in the West Bank, that a 27-year-old Palestinian inmate was brutally raped as follows:

A pipe from a fire extinguisher was used on a handcuffed prisoner. Forcing him to lie on his stomach, stripping him of all his clothes, and inserting the pipe of the fire extinguisher into the prisoner’s rectum. Then, activating the extinguisher ... in front of the eyes of the other prisoners.

The case of Palestinian bodybuilder [Muazzaz Abayat from Bethlehem](#), who lost half his body weight during his nine-month incarceration, is indicative of the inhumane conditions that all prisoners are subjected to and that the foul treatment is in no way confined to the detention camps surrounding Gaza.

Official Israeli figures put the number of Palestinian political prisoners at just under 10,000, including 3,380 administrative detainees and [250 children](#). These numbers are clearly [inaccurate](#), given that Israel’s Shin Bet director has already estimated detainees to number around 21,000 – in June. The exact figures remain elusive, and many prisoners remain unaccounted for. The confirmed death toll among Palestinian

prisoners, [currently at 53](#), is also likely an underestimation, as many detainees are still considered missing.

In stark contrast to the intense media coverage and political concern for the Israeli captives held in Gaza, the plight of Palestinian detainees is largely ignored.

There are more Palestinian children held as hostages by Israel than the total number of Israelis seized on 7 October, even according to the lower 10,000 prisoner estimate. In comparison to the suffering of Palestinian detainees, the issue of their Israeli counterparts – less than 100, by some accounts – is a mere drop in the ocean.