

Evaluating the Israeli Occupation Policies of Depriving Palestinian Prisoners of Education since 1967

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Abstract

The plight of prisoners, and their ongoing tragedy, is a paramount issue for the Palestinian people. They represent a significant cause in the struggle for liberation from occupation. This issue has been a foremost concern since the Nakba in 1948 and is a top priority for Palestinian liberation movements striving for their release. "As of the end of January 2023, the number of prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails reached approximately 4,780, including 29 female prisoners, about 160 minors including three juvenile females, and 915 administrative detainees, including one woman and five children."¹

These prisoners endure extremely harsh conditions and are subjected to continuous punitive measures by their jailers. They face numerous violations perpetrated by the occupying forces, encompassing all aspects of prisoners' lives. This includes prolonged solitary confinement, deprivation of family visits or communication, medical neglect, violations in the realm of worship and religious freedom, and the areas of education, culture, and entertainment, along with physical abuse and torture.² A significant number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails are sentenced to terms spanning hundreds of years, effectively condemning them to die within prison walls, which inherently denies them rights to education, marriage, and more, except in limited, exceptional cases. More than 5400 Palestinian prisoners have been denied this right.³

¹ "The number of prisoners in the occupation prisons during the year 2023," Palestinian National Information Center Wafa, accessed on 16/11/2023, <https://bit.ly/3nc3hjV>

² Cries from behind the scenes: Obtaining property rights in Israeli prisons (Um Alfahm: Al-Resala Publishing and Media, 2009).

³ Yousef Al-Jamal, "Palestinian Prisoners in Israel's Jail: Facts and Resources," April 15, 2019. <https://bit.ly/32Z3S94> ⁴ Administrative detention is detention without charges or trial. It relies on a secret file and confidential evidence that the detainee or his lawyer cannot access. According to Israeli military orders, the administrative detention order can be renewed unlimited times, where an administrative detention order is issued for a maximum period of six months, subject to renewal. For more information look: <https://bit.ly/3TyfHyT>

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For instance, since 2006, as a collective punishment for Hamas' capture of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Palestinian prisoners sentenced to less than five years have been deprived of their educational rights. This includes those held under “administrative detention”.⁴ Furthermore, prisoners sentenced to more than five years are only allowed to study in Israeli universities in Hebrew, a language most are not proficient in.⁴ The deprivation of education is not limited to higher education but also affects children in Israeli prisons. In 2018, over 800 Palestinian children, from Jerusalem were arrested; they have the right to appropriate education but were denied this right. Prison authorities prevented the entry of educational and written materials for them, and refused to establish classrooms for imprisoned children, then punished those who gave lectures inside the cells.⁵ Thus, briefly, this paper presents how the Israeli occupation targeted the education of Palestinian prisoners and deprived them of it. By employing a series of interviews, including some with prisoners inside jails, and relying on a broad range of related academic literature, this paper attempts to assess the policies of the occupation in depriving Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and explores how prisoners have tried to overcome these policies and challenges, to obtain the right to education, or to wrest this right through peaceful protests and various means within the prison, or by other methods.

Keywords: Israel Occupation, Palestinian prisoners, education

⁴ “Shackling the Scholar: Israel’s Administrative Detention of Palestinian Students,” Right to Education Campaign - Birziet University, November 5, 2013, <https://bit.ly/32YRrtP>.

⁵ Raafat Hamdouna, “Creative Aspects in the History of the Captive Palestinian National Movement in the Period from 1985 to 2015 AD” (Institute for Arab Research and Studies, 2015), p185–197.