

Arrests in Al-Quds

Since the beginning of the popular uprising, which started in Jerusalem's Damascus Gate on the first of Ramadan and extended to al-Sheikh Jarrah, al-Aqsa mosque and to the rest of Palestine, Palestine as a whole has been witnessing campaigns of vicious repression and abuse.

These campaigns took several forms, the most predominant of which has been a wave of intensive and escalating arrests. In fact, between 1 April and 24 May, Israeli occupation authorities arrested more than 2,000 Palestinians from all over Palestine.

This report focuses on statistics and patterns concerning the wave of arrests in Jerusalem; these figures and patterns were monitored through our communication with lawyers and through testimonies presented by released prisoners and detainees. According to attorney Amjad Abu Asab, the head of the Prisoners' Families Committee in Jerusalem, at least 550 arrests were documented in Jerusalem between 14 April and 24 May. An estimated 25 per cent of these arrests targeted minors.

The Objective of Mass Arrests

Arrests have always constituted a major pillar in the Israeli system of repression, but even by Israel's own notorious standards, the arrest campaign during this uprising has seen a significant escalation. The escalation is reflected in the numbers of arrests, the beating and abuse endured by detainees during and after their detention, and the patterns of these arrests. The arrest campaign is designed to crush the uprising, thwart its continuation and expansion, terrorize Palestinians and deter them from defending their homes and lands in the face of Israeli aggression and plans to expel and erase them.

The Patterns of Arrests

Arrests have been carried out by the different arms of the Israeli colonial regime including its police, border police special units and mista'arvim (undercover police forces.) Among the common patterns these arrests have taken are:

- Arrests during protests: Israeli occupation authorities carried out scores of arrests during protests, many of which morphed into confrontations between Palestinian youth and Israeli police in areas like Damascus Gate, al-Sheikh Jarrah, and al-Aqsa mosque.
- Random arrests: The uprising has also seen waves of random arrests in the vicinity of protests or confrontations like the main roads in Jerusalem, the Old City, and near its different gates.

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- Arrests following raids on homes: Israeli forces raided several homes in Jerusalem, assaulting and arresting Palestinian Jerusalemites from their homes. This pattern of arrests targeted former Jerusalemite leaders and ex-prisoners. Several cases of assault against the detainees and their families were also documented.

Some of these arrests can be classified as “preemptive arrests,” and such arrests, especially those that target party members or prominent figures, are part of an intelligence-led effort to quell the uprising and curtail it.

This pattern may also include raiding homes to arrest people for having participated in protests or confrontations. Such was the case in Shu’fat following one episode of clashes in the village. Many of these arrests usually take place once the dust of clashes settles, to give intelligence services time to collect whatever flimsy evidence they can come up with to prepare the indictments.

Assaults During and After Detention

Regardless of the pattern, occupation forces repeatedly assaulted and beat detainees, including on their heads. Cases of spinal and cervical fractures and broken arms were documented among detainees. Israeli police deliberately fixed detainees’ heads to the ground before striking them with the butts of their rifles and with their sticks. The beatings and abuse continue in the cars that transport the detainees to the police stations. Released prisoner F.M. says in his testimony that although he had been arrested on several occasions prior to this uprising, the severity of the beating and abuse he endured in his arrest during this uprising was unprecedented. The police arrested him from his home after thoroughly inspecting it and beating on the walls whilst using attack dogs. He was then transported to the police jeep where he was thrown on the floor and where police officers stamped on his head and his body, beating him all the way until they reached the Russian Compound detention center.

L.G., another released prisoner, says in his testimony that he was beaten on his face, eyes, head, and chest. He was beaten unconscious and suffered inflammations his face, requiring his transfer to the hospital.

The Right to See a Lawyer

The lawyers in Jerusalem reiterated that detainees, especially minors, have the right to legal consultation before interrogation and have the right to see their lawyers in person despite attempts by the interrogators to convince detainees to talk to the lawyers only by phone. Israeli police endeavors to disrupt and complicate the work of the lawyers, exhausting them by delaying the start of interrogation and conducting them at late

hours. To cope with this wave of mass arrests, lawyers volunteered to form groups that represent detainees and prisoners pro bono and to confront the Israeli judiciary, which is an arm of the colonial system. Such voluntary initiatives and collaboration among the lawyers should be expanded.

Conditional Release

Many detainees and arrestees, especially those arrested randomly, were either released on the same night of their arrest or within 24 hours without being brought before the court for remand. Among the conditions imposed on their release are banishment from specific areas like al-Sheikh Jarrah and Damascus Gate and al-Aqsa mosque and the banishment period ranges from two weeks to six months. Long-term banishment often seeks to banish the conditionally-released detainee from al-Aqsa mosque compound. Other conditions imposed are house arrest and paying bails that range from NIS500 to NIS5,000. Unpaid bails, those required if the detainee violates one of the conditions of his/her release, may reach NIS25,000.

Indictment

Other detainees are remanded, at times without any legal justification, and the prosecution files indictments against them. Charges vary and include rioting, contempt of cops, and even affiliation to a “terrorist” organization. Among the indications to the escalation we are witnessing is the fact that four Jerusalemite prisoners have been issued administrative detention orders, detention without charges or trial, during May.

The high number of arrests has led to the over-crowding of the Russian Compound detention Center and the transfer of some Jerusalemite detainees to remote detention centers like Majiddo in northern Palestine. This makes family and lawyer visits even more difficult.

In addition to its quest for intimidation and deterrence, the wave of mass arrests seeks to exhaust Palestinians, disperse their efforts, erase their collective struggle, and to transform it into an individual one, led by each individual prisoner’s family in Israel’s courts of injustice.

Nonetheless, this quest has failed to deter young Jerusalemites who continue to stand up to and oppose Israel’s machinery of oppression. Thus, they embody the slogan: Detentions shall not terrorize us.