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Physicians for Human Rights-Israel Establishes A Situation Room on the Issue of the Mass Hunger Strike by Palestinian Prisoners and Detainees held in Prisons inside Israel

Update on Palestinian Hunger Striking Prisoners in Prisons in Israel and Announcement about the Establishment of a Situation Room

Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR-IL) is establishing a situation room today for the mass hunger strike by Palestinian detainees and prisoners held in prisons inside Israel. The situation room will operate around the clock and work to gather and distribute any relevant information and to enable a public campaign for supporting the demands by the prisoners to respect their human rights. The PHR situation room will gather and provide the maximum information to the families of hunger striking prisoners, their attorneys, physicians, and local and foreign human rights organizations, local and foreign diplomats, national and international media, and the public at large.

The Palestinian prisoners and detainees in the Israeli prisons are holding two primary struggles, by means of open-ended hunger strikes

1 A struggle against administrative detention - this is a struggle started by (former) administrative detainees Khader Adnan, and Hana Shalabi following his strike. To the best of our knowledge, as per today (May 6th) there are 7 hunger-striking administrative detainees who are in very advanced stages of this strike, most of whom are more than 40 days into their hunger strike. Two of the administrative detainees, Bilal Diab and Thaer Halahleh, have been on hunger strike for more than 70 days, and are in imminent risk of death.

The struggle of the hunger strikers protesting the use of administrative detention has been going on for about four months, and has brought public awareness to the topic of administrative detention, in Israel and abroad. There have been recent reports that the Minister of Public Security recommends that the use of administrative detention be reduced. PHR stresses the need for swift action by the government of Israel to prevent the loss of human lives.

2. A struggle for humane imprisonment conditions that respect human rights - a mass hunger strike was started on 17 April 2012, with the participation of between 1,500 and 2,000 prisoners. In recent years, detention conditions have become harsher for Palestinian prisoners, and collective punishment is inflicted on them as a matter of policy, in violation of their basic and legal rights enshrined in both Israeli and international law, and in blatant disregard of international criticism. The situation of Palestinian prisoners has aggravated, and it is currently anchored in various laws and regulations. While Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was held captive, the Israeli government intentionally worsened prisoner conditions in order to exert pressure on the Palestinian leadership. In September 2011, before the "Shalit Transaction" was carried out, hundreds of Palestinian prisoners started a hunger strike to protest against the conditions of their imprisonment. But even after the Shalit Exchange was completed, and after Shalit himself was released, and despite the undertaking by the Israel Prison Service to meet some of the demands of the hunger strikers at the time, the situation has remained as before, and even became worse.

Physicians for Human Rights received a letter from the representative of the Nafha Prison, which announced that the prisoners were joining the mass hunger strikes, and asked the

organization for support. In the past few days a general call was issued by the prisoners in Nafha Prison to boycott the Israel Prison Service's clinics and physicians, and a demand to allow visits by independent physicians on behalf of PHR. We are working to bring an independent team of physicians into the Nafha Prison.

The Primary Demands by the Palestinian Prisoners

- Removal of Palestinian prisoners from solitary confinement, including prisoners who are members of the political leadership.
- Termination of the practice of imprisoning Palestinian prisoners in prisons inside Israel in violation of International Law.
- Renewal of family visits from Gaza, which Israel has been preventing completely for five years now; the renewal of family visits for several hundred Palestinian prisoners from the West Bank whose families are prevented by Israel from visiting, and the removal of obstacles impeding family visits in general.
- Provision of appropriate medical care.
- Termination of the policy of daily cell searches under application of physical force.
- Termination of the policy of strip-searching prisoners and visiting family members.
- Termination of the practice of shackling and handcuffing of prisoners during family or attorney visits and during medical treatment in hospitals.
- Fulfilling the prisoners' right to an education.
- Termination of the severe and disproportional policy of punishments, as expressed in physical confinement, monetary fines, prevention of family visits, denial of canteen rights, etc.
- Termination of the violation of the basic rights of the Palestinian detainees such as the right to meet an attorney in the course of an investigation, and the reduction of judicial oversight on the process of detention and investigation.

Physicians for Human Rights-Israel supports the prisoners' struggle and their demand for a full respect of their human rights. We are acting on several levels in order to make sure that the prisoners' rights are maintained in the course of the hunger strike.

The following are the focal issues that come up in the course of Prison Service and medical establishment conduct during the hunger strike

- **Regular access by independent physicians:** the Israel Prison Service does not permit regular access by independent physicians to examine the hunger strikers, and refuses or ignores requests by Physicians for Human Rights. The PHR team has had to file legal petitions for every single visit and for each individual physician. The process of filing the petitions slows the care for the hunger strikers, requires significant financial resources, and constitutes an obstruction of appropriate care for the hunger strikers, as well as obstruction of their right to an independent physician. Prisoners frequently prefer and demand to be seen by an independent physician, as they do not have faith in physicians employed by the Prison Service. PHR-IL demands regular, authorized, independent visits by independent physicians for every hunger striker who demands to receive them.
- **Updating the hunger strikers' families:** the Israel Prison Service does not inform the families of hunger strikers about their condition. This leads to the spread of various rumors

about the prisoners' conditions, and to stress and uncertainty among the families. The Prison Service and the hospitals where the hunger strikers are hospitalized must act to provide regular updates to the families of the hunger strikers.

- **Failure to transfer hunger strikers in serious medical condition to civilian public hospitals:** despite the fact that the Prison Service medical center does not have all means required for appropriate care for the long-term hunger strikers, the Prison Service has been delaying the transfer of hunger strikers to public hospitals. The Prison Service must adopt the principle of transferring every hunger striker who passes the fortieth day of strike to a public hospital, for hospitalization and for further treatment. See [here \[hebrew\]](#) a communication on this matter to the Prison Service.

- **Shackling of hospitalized prisoners:** Despite the ethical prohibition on shackling hospitalized prisoners, the Prison Service continues to employ this practice. It has recently become known that hunger striker Bilal Diab is shackled to his hospital bed at the Assaf Harofeh Hospital by three of his limbs.

- **Cessation of pressure by medical teams to terminate the strike:** prisoners have reported to attorneys visiting them that pressures are applied to them, in an attempt to persuade them to break the hunger strike, including threats by various members of the medical team. This is a violation of medical ethics, which require physicians to do their best for the benefit of the patient, and in accordance with his wishes. PHR-IL calls on medical teams in the prisons to end this practice, and again brings up the fact that the physicians in the Prison Service are in a state of double loyalty: while physicians are expected to stand by their patients, Prison Service doctors are employed by the Prison Service, and they are beholden to the pressures and interests of the apparatus which employs them.

- **Isolation of the hunger striking detainees from all external contact in order to increasing the pressure on them:** despite the fact that the prisoners' rights include the right to legal representation, to be seen by independent physicians, and to receive family visits, the hunger strikers are denied these rights in an attempt to repress their protests. Collective punishment of the hunger strikers, including the denial of basic rights such as access to justice and legal representation and the right to health, constitutes a grievous violation of the prisoners' rights. The imprisoning system must bring this practice to a halt, and must provide the hunger strikers with full protection and access to the world outside the prison.

- **Force-feeding/forced medical care:** despite the fact that force-feeding has not yet been initiated in practice, this option is brought up repeatedly in various discussions, as a way to handle the hunger strikers forcefully. Force-feeding violates the Malta Declaration and could also constitute a form of torture, as well as inhumane and humiliating treatment. PHR demands that any option of force-feeding be ruled out completely, and in any event stresses that a medical team cannot take part in an action that violates the preference of the patient.

PHR is making a significant effort to treat and represent people whose medical condition is the worst, and whose right to health and appropriate treatment is being violated behind prison walls. Below follows some information about the prisoners whom the organization is caring for, and who are at advanced stages of their hunger strikes, along with updates about their condition:

Detainees on Hunger Strike to Protest Administrative Detention

Bilal Diab: on hunger strike since 28 February 2012 - this is the 71th day of his hunger strike

A volunteer physician with PHR has twice visited Mr. Diab. In both cases, a petition to the court was needed before she was allowed in, as a doctor. The first visit took place on 9 April 2012, the second on 30 April 2012.

On 2 May 2012, a petition was filed for a third visit in accordance with the ruling by Justice Tal of 24 April 2012, which stipulated that a doctor's visit should be made possible by 1 May 2012, and if there would be a medical need, an additional visit would be coordinate in the course of May, but the Israeli Prison Service is refusing to coordinate the upcoming dates that were suggested, with the argument that the doctors would not be able to accompany the independent doctors at certain hours and days, an argument that contradicts the Prison Service's argument that doctors are available on site 24 hours a day, and taking care of the hunger strikers.

On 5 May 2012, a Physicians for Human Rights team obtained information from Bilal Diab's attorney, according to which the latter stopped receiving any treatment, except for the drinking of liquids, and refuses to receive any medical treatment.

According to the estimate of the PHR volunteer physician who visited Mr. Diab on 30 April 2012, he was in immediate mortal danger. After her visit on that day, and her insistence that Mr. Diab would be hospitalized, Mr. Diab was transferred to a civilian hospital, but returned to the prison clinic a few hours later. For further information, see the press release that was issued [link?].

On 30 April 2012, a request was sent to the Prison Service to transfer Bilal Diab immediately and hospitalize him in a public hospital, as per the medical report. Copies were given to the Israeli Ministry of Health and to the Israel Medical Association.

On 1 May 2012, Bilal Diab was rushed to Assaf Harofeh hospital again due to "deliriousness", as reported by the hospital. The PHR physician discussed this matter directly with the Director-General of the Israeli Health Ministry.

On 1 May 2012, a petition was filed to allow Bilal Diab's family to visit him. The petition was heard the following day, but the prosecution argued that due to an error it had not received a copy of the petition. Despite the doctor's report that pointed at immediate risk to his life, it was decided to postpone the decision to May 7th.

On 3 May 2012 we heard via Mr. Diab's attorney that he is shackled by three limbs. A request was sent to the hospital, to the Israeli Ministry of Health, to the Prison Service, and to the Israel Medical Association to free him from shackling (enclosed).

On 3 May 2012, Mr. Diab collapsed in the course of the Supreme court hearing of his administrative case, and he was brought back to the hospital. Ahmad Tibi, a medical doctor and a member of the Israeli parliament who was present in the courtroom, examined Mr. Diab, and warned that he was at immediate risk of death, and wrote a report, at the request of PHR, that was enclosed with PHR's petition to the Petah Tikva District Court on 6 May 2012. This report requests that an independent physician be allowed to visit Mr. Diab on behalf of Physicians for Human Rights, and also, that his family be allowed to visit him. The Supreme Court is expected to rule on Mr. Diab's petition, as well as on the petition of another administrative detainee, Thaer Halahleh, today (Sunday, May 6th)

Thaer Halahleh: on hunger strike since 28 February 2012 - this is the 71th day of his hunger strike

A PHR volunteer physician has visited Mr. Halahleh twice. In both cases, a petition to the court was needed before she was allowed in, as a doctor. The first visit took place on 9 April 2012, the second on 30 April 2012.

The physician volunteer recommends, among other things, that pleural infection and lung clotting be ruled out. Thaer Halahleh has not yet been transferred to a hospital. A notification on this was published on 30 April 2012.

On 30 April 2012, a request was sent to the Prison Service to transfer Mr. Halahleh immediately to a public hospital for hospitalization, as per the medical report. Copies were given to the Israeli Ministry of Health and to the Israel Medical Association.

On 1 May 2012, a petition was filed to allow Thaer Halahleh's family to visit him. No answer has been received.

On 2 May 2012, a petition was filed for a third doctor's visit in accordance with the ruling by Justice Tal of 24 April 2012, which stipulated that a doctor's visit should be allowed before 1 May 2012, and if there would be a medical need, an additional visit would be coordinate in the course of May, but the Israeli Prison Service is refusing to coordinate the upcoming dates that were suggested, with the argument that the doctors would not be able to accompany the independent doctors at certain hours and days, an argument that contradicts the Prison Service's argument that doctors are available on site 24 hours a day, and taking care of the hunger strikers.

On 3 May 2012, a petition was submitted to the District Court to have Mr. Halahleh transferred to a public hospital.

Hassan el-Safadi: on hunger strike since 5 March 2012 - this is the 65th day of his hunger strike

On 1 May 2012, a petition was filed with the Petah Tikva District Court to allow a visit by an independent physician, after requests by the PHR had been disregarded for two weeks. The court ordered that a PHR physician be allowed to examine Mr. Safadi before May 7th. Yesterday, May 7th, a PHR-Israel physician examined Mr. Safadi and determined that he needs to be urgently transferred to hospital. Detailed Information regarding Mr. Safadi's medical situation will follow.

Hassan el-Safadi's appeals were rejected by all the instances of the military court system, and even by the Israeli Supreme Court, but he announced that he would continue his hunger strike until he would be released.

On 3 May 2012 he was visited by attorney Muhammad Mahajneh on behalf of Physicians for Human Rights – Israel(after a request for a visit had previously been denied several times). The attorney told the PHR team that he had met the section commander, who told him that if Hassan el-Safadi would not agree to ingest liquids and vitamins, they would be given to him by force. The attorney described el-Safadi's situation as grievous, and said that he had been refusing any form of treatment for two weeks now, including liquids and vitamins, and that he refuses to be examined by the Prison Service doctors. Hassan el-Safadi requests being seen and examined by an independent physician with PHR.

Omar Abu Shalal: on hunger strike since 7 March 2012 - this is the 63nd day of his hunger strike

Not yet examined by an independent physician.

On 2 May 2012, a petition was submitted by PHR to allow Mr. Abu Shalal to be seen by a doctor, as the Prison Service is not responding to direct requests by PHR. A court hearing on the matter is scheduled for 7 May.

Jafar Izz el-Din: on hunger strike since 21 March 2012 - this is the 47th day of his hunger strike

On 2 May 2012, a petition was submitted by PHR to allow Mr. Abu Shalal to be seen by a doctor, after the Prison Service is not responding to direct requests by PHR. A court hearing on the matter is scheduled for 7 May. When visited by a PHR attorney, Mr. Izz el-Din told him that a Prison Service doctor threatened him that if he would not voluntarily submit to examinations, she would perform them by force.

Ahmad Ali Ahmad: We do not know the exact date on which he started his hunger strike. This is believed to be the 17th day of his hunger strike

Mr. Ahmad is 72 years old. He is a member of the Palestinian parliament. His medical history includes angioplasty, chronic blood pressure issues, and rheumatism.

Even though permission for a visit by an independent PHR doctor was received, the prison has been evading the coordination of such a visit for over a week.

Muhammad Suleyman: administrative detainee, suffers from thalassemia. He has been refusing medical treatment (but not food) for 36 days, since 2 April 2012.

Mr. Suleyman refuses to receive blood transfusions and iron chelation agents - a treatment required for his illness.

According to the estimation by a volunteer PHR physician, substantial damage may occur after a month of cessation of treatment, in the form of cardiac and liver damage and risk of death. A request was submitted for a visit by an independent physician, and we are waiting for an answer.

Mahmoud Sarsaq: we do not know the exact date on which he started his hunger strike. This is believed to be the 47th day of his hunger strike

According to the information available to us, Mr. Sarsaq is held under the “Unlawful Combatants Imprisonment Act”. Israel uses this law to imprison residents of the Gaza Strip in a procedure similar to that of administrative detention. Under this law, it is possible to imprison a person on the basis of secret evidence for an indefinite period of time. Physicians for Human Rights is working to get Mr. Sarsaq visited by an independent physician.

Prisoners (Convicted) on hunger strike (advanced stages)

Muhammad Rafiq Taj: on hunger strike since 18 March 2012 - this is the 51st day of his Hunger Strike

Held in isolation with one other prisoner (“dual isolation”) in a one-person cell. Forbidden family visits. Suffers from various chronic medical conditions.

On 3 May 2012, a petition was submitted to the court to allow him to be seen by an independent physician.

Yesterday, May 7th, four appeals to allow PHR Israel’s independent doctor to visit detainees on hunger strike were heard at Petach-Tikva District court by Justice Abraham Tal. The judge refused to discuss the principle issue of entry of independent doctors to hunger strikers, and was willing to discuss the cases only on an individual basis. In the Case of Hassan Al Safadi, who is on day 65 of his hunger strike the appeal was withdrawn as the IPS agreed to allow our doctor in. In the cases of Muhamad Rafiq Taj (day 51 of hunger strike), Jafar Azedin (day 48) and Omar Abu Shalal (day 63), Justice Tal ruled that following a confirmation by the security authorities, the IPS will enable PHR-Israel doctors to examine those individuals within 24 hour from receiving the confirmation, and no later than 3 days from the ruling.

Azzam Diab: this is probably the 46th day of his hunger strike

Brother of hunger striker Bilal Diab. Striking in solidarity with his brother until his release, and in solidarity with all other prisoners.

Abbas el-Sayed: on hunger strike since 18 April 2012 - this is the 21th day of his hunger strike

Our request to have him seen by a doctor was submitted to the Prison Service on 2 April 2012 after it was reported that he was injured when attacked during the forceful taking of a DNA sample against his will.

Further information and current updates about the struggle of the prisoners can be found in the situation room:

On the PHR website: phr.org.il

On Facebook: [facebook/phril](https://www.facebook.com/phril)

On Twitter: twitter.com/#!/PHR_IL

ENDS