



Israeli prison system claims another life

Description

ISRAEL : Israeli prison authorities are refusing to return the body of author and activist Walid Daqqa to his family following his death in detention on 7 April.

Daqqa had spent the majority of his life in Israeli custody and was one of the longest-serving Palestinian prisoners. He had been terminally ill with cancer.

Israeli authorities arrested Daqqa when he was 24 years old in March 1986 for allegedly participating in armed resistance as a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a leftist political party. He was sentenced to life in prison, which was later reduced to 37 years.

He completed his 37-year sentence in March 2023. However, in 2018, his detention was extended by two years by Israeli authorities, citing allegations of smuggling phones into his cell.

His new release date had been scheduled for March 2025. Daqqa hailed from the Palestinian city of Baqa al-Gharbiyye in Israel. He authored multiple books in prison.

A Palestinian woman named Sana Salameh visited Daqqa for an interview, and they subsequently became a couple. In 1999, after persistent efforts with the prison authorities, Daqqa and Salameh managed to wed in a legendary celebration at Ashkelon prison in southern Israel.

They were joined by a select few of Daqqa's fellow prisoners, as well as some of their families and friends.

Israeli prison authorities denied the couple conjugal visits despite their prolonged struggle for the right. The couple resorted to conceiving through smuggled sperm, ultimately welcoming a daughter whom they named Milad.

Release his body

Despite repeated campaigns by human rights organizations urging his immediate release, Israel insisted on keeping Daqqa imprisoned even as he was fighting a rare case of bone marrow cancer.

The Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC), which includes a number of groups, sent an urgent appeal last year to the UN Special Procedures – a body that handles such cases – calling for Daqqa’s release.

The council said Daqqa was “facing imminent deteriorating health conditions due to Israeli Prison Services (IPS) policy of deliberate medical neglect.”

Amnesty International similarly called for his release “on humanitarian grounds” to “allow him to spend his remaining time with his family.”

Amnesty is now calling on Israel to release Daqqa’s body.

“Even on his deathbed, Israeli authorities continued to display chilling levels of cruelty against Walid Daqqa and his family, not only denying him adequate medical treatment and suitable food, but also preventing him from saying a final goodbye to his wife Sana Salameh and their 4-year-old daughter Milad,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty International’s Senior Director for Research, Advocacy, Policy and Campaigns.

Salameh “could not embrace her dying husband one last time before he passed.”

Israeli authorities must release Daqqa’s “body to his family without delay” in order to “give him a peaceful and dignified burial and allow them to mourn his death without intimidation.”

Israeli occupation forces, however, stormed and dismantled the funeral tent where people gathered to mourn Daqqa. They arrested some of his relatives. Large numbers of Israeli forces also raided the home of Daqqa’s family.

Israel’s far-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir publicly endorsed these brutal actions.

The minister gave “kudos” to the Israeli police responsible for dismantling Daqqa’s funeral tent. He expressed regret that Daqqa died a supposedly “natural death,” preferring that he get the death penalty.

Regular amputations

Daqqa’s death marks the 15th Palestinian fatality in Israeli detention since 7 October 2023, with the Palestinian Prisoners Club attributing these deaths to torture, incarceration, starvation and medical negligence.

Meanwhile, Palestinians abducted from Gaza and detained in a prison camp are subjected to routine amputations due to severe cuff injuries.

This disturbing revelation comes from an Israeli field doctor who had worked at the Sde Teiman facility, an army base situated between Beersheba and Gaza in the southern Negev region. Israeli authorities

detain Palestinians from Gaza there before transferring them to other prisons.

The army camp “has been turned into a Guantánamo-like prison,” according to the human rights group Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor.

“Detainees there are held in extreme conditions akin to open-air chicken cages, without access to food or drink for long periods of time,” the group added.

“Just this week, two prisoners had their legs amputated due to handcuff injuries, which unfortunately is a routine event,” the physician wrote in a letter to Israeli leaders at the time, which was reported by newspaper Haaretz.

Palestinian detainees at the Sde Teiman camp “are handcuffed 24 hours a day,” the newspaper reported. This policy came into effect after a medical staffer was allegedly attacked.

Handcuffing, which the physician says is on all four limbs, is causing severe injuries that “require repeated surgical interventions,” the physician said.

Detainees, constantly handcuffed, are fed through straws, and are forced to defecate in diapers.

Israeli authorities had initially employed plastic handcuffs but have now replaced them with metal ones. At least one detainee had their hand amputated due to prolonged wear of plastic handcuffs, according to three sources cited by the Israeli newspaper.

An Israeli military spokesperson declared that “no criminal offense was found” during an investigation, deciding not to initiate a military police inquiry.

Even when patients undergo major operations, they never remain in the hospital for more than a few hours and are transported back to Sde Teiman regardless of post-operative observation.

Typically, only one doctor is available at the detention camp, often an orthopedist or gynecologist.

“This ends in complications and sometimes even in the patient’s death,” the physician wrote.

Euro-Med Monitor interviewed Palestinians from Gaza who had been detained by Israeli forces, and reported being subjected to abuse, beatings, threats, stress positions and other forms of mistreatment that the group says amount to torture.

“Every new place had a unique method of torture,” one detainee told the human rights group, recounting being moved from one location to another. He said he was “struck in the head by an officer,” adding that the severe cold prevented him from sleeping.

Another detainee described being forced “to completely undress” and enduring severe beatings “with rugs and rifle butts.” He also stated that Israeli authorities “threatened to rape my family.”

A female detainee shared a similar account, saying she was forced to undress.

“Every time I was stripped nude, with the female soldiers putting their hands on me, while male soldiers occasionally made rude comments, harsh insults that I cannot [repeat], and rape threats,” she told

Euro-Med Monitor.

Nearly 1,900 Palestinians have been abducted from Gaza and are still held in Israeli prisons as of this month. This figure does not include those detained at the Sde Teiman facility, which typically accommodates 600 to 800 individuals.

BY Tamara Nassar

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