

Report reveals illegal treatment widespread in Israel prisons



Ramallah, May 21 (RHC)-- A new report has found that prisoners in Israeli jails are often kept in facilities "unfit for human residence" and constantly face illegal punitive measures, according to a probe made by the Israeli Public Defense Office (PDO) and published in recent days.

"This is a nationwide problem that causes a daily violation of prisoners' and detainees' basic rights and a violation of their human rights," the report reads, based on findings made on surprise visits conducted by PDO staff to various facilities between 2017 and 2018.

The report found that inmates are often kept in facilities "unfit for human residence". Sanitation issues were found in 19 prison facilities, some of these problems included mold in prison walls, and the presence of mice, cockroaches, bedbugs, and rats infesting cells and beds. At Ayalon Prison, some prisoners said they prefer sleeping on the floor because of bedbugs in the mattresses.

The report also pointed out that in 16 cases, the space for each prisoner was half of the less than the bare minimum of three square meters per inmate currently required by the High Court of Justice. A lack of working toilets, windows and delivery of fresh clothes was reported.

"Two other minors said that while in solitary confinement, their mattresses were taken during the day so they were forced to lie on metal beds," the report added.

However, the most worrying matters are the systematic violations of human rights. Some of the illegal measures found were the use of strip-searches as a punitive measure or “deterrent”, especially in Ayalon Prison, where it seems to be a routine practice.

In Palestine, children as young as 12 can be arrested, interrogated, and detained in Israeli military courts. The PDO also reported on the binding of inmates to their beds for hours even days. In some cases, prisoners defecated on themselves as they had been tied for long periods of time in hurtful positions with their hands above their heads.

The constant disregard of physical and mental health of the prisoners is also a common situation. One prisoner was sprayed with water and forced to stay in wet clothes for several days.

Back in January 2019, Strategic Affairs and Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said, referring to Palestinian prisoners as "terrorists", that making "conditions worse is necessary both to create deterrence and to fulfill our moral duty to terror victims and their families."

According to the Palestinian Prisoners and Former Prisoners' Affairs Committee, as of January 31, around 5,700 Palestinians were held in Israeli prisons, including 48 women, and 230 children under 18 years of age. The report noted that the use of binding to the beds is specially used at Ofek Prison, where only teenagers are jailed.

The total number of administrative detainees is at 500, with around 95 Palestinians being held in administrative detention without charge or trial in the same month, 50 of them were newly detained. Some Palestinian prisoners have been held in administrative detention for up to 11 years.

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