

Rights group warns of 'slow death' of Palestinians in Saudi jails



Inside view of the al-Ha'ir prison south of the Saudi capital Riyadh

Geneva, March 30 (RHC)-- A Geneva-based rights group has warned about the deadly prison conditions faced by scores of Palestinians and Jordanians, who are being kept in Saudi Arabia for assisting Palestinian resistance groups.

The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor released the report titled "Slow Death and Absent Justice" based on testimonies offered by former prisoners' family members. The prisoners were rounded up en masse in an "arbitrary" Saudi arrest campaign last year, the group wrote, identifying the inmates as "students, academics, businessmen and workers in relief institutions."

They were then forced into various jails across the kingdom, where they have been suffering from "physical torture, isolation, and deliberate medical neglect," it added. The body cited a former detainee as revealing his suffering from "exceedingly difficult" prison conditions for an entire year, including three months in solitary confinement.

"The prison administration used to intently disable the ventilation in the prison rooms, which are accumulated with prisoners beyond their capacity. We were only allowed to be exposed to sunlight once a month for just 10 minutes," he said.

"It was not permissible to buy from the prison grocery store except for extremely limited things and once every three months. We were only allowed to go to the bathroom for two minutes a day. In addition, the amount of food was too small, and the quality was very poor," the former inmate noted.

Relatives of Muhammad al-Khudari, an official with the Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas, have bemoaned the 83-year-old's detention conditions too. "My brother Muhammad suffers from prostate cancer and needs medical and health care and follow-up that is not available in the medical clinics in Saudi prisons...My brother now has difficulties to walk.... Some of his teeth fell out, and he cannot move his right hand," his brother Abdul Majid told the rights group.

Upon arrest, the detainees were pushed through summary trials. The hearings saw the kingdom leveling a set of charges against them based on its notorious "Anti-Terrorism Law."

The country revised the law in 2017, expanding its scope to a controversial extent. Ever since, it has launched several instances of detention spree, seizing hundreds of royals, businessmen, male and female activists and dissidents among other people.

The rights organization denounced the Saudi law for "including vague and overbroad definitions of terrorism and related activities, which reinforce assumptions that the Saudi authorities intend to use these materials to incriminate the accused."

The Saudi regime has also been denounced widely by Palestinian groups for trampling on Palestinians' rights through other means for years.

The regime reportedly held clandestine contact with the occupying Israeli regime for long. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu secretly visited the kingdom late last year in a sign of Riyadh's ties with Tel Aviv.



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