

Palestinian prisoner to continue with prolonged hunger strike until release

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Palestinian prisoner Khalil Awawdeh (Photo via social media networks)

Ramallah, August 22 (RHC)-- Lawyers for hunger-striking Palestinian prisoner Khalil Awawdeh say he will press ahead with his 168-day fast until he is granted a full release even after the Israeli regime was forced to temporarily freeze the 40-year-old's detention.

Awawdeh's lawyers made the announcement after an Israeli military court urgently suspended the administrative detention of the hunger-striking Palestinian. The Israeli court had earlier rejected an appeal to free Awawdeh despite the worsening of his health condition after 168 days of abstinence from food.

Ahlan Haddad, one of Awawdeh's lawyers, was quoted by the Palestinian media as saying his "hunger strike will not be suspended because he is asking for his release and not for a freeze of his detention."

Stressing that her client's health has been deteriorating and he is seeking to be released, Haddad said Awawdeh has not eaten since March 4, except for a 10-day period in which he received vitamin injections.

The Palestinian Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs derided the Israeli suspension of Awawdeh's detention and called for further pressure on the regime for his full release. "The decision to suspend prisoner Awawdeh's administrative detention is laughable," the commission said, adding, "We must ignore it in terms of the media and public. What is needed is more pressure on the occupation and the implementation of all means of support for this heroic [hunger] strike."

The commission warned on Sunday of the possibility that Awawdeh could lose his life as his health condition had drastically deteriorated. "Prisoner Awawdeh's health condition is getting worse day by day," commission spokesperson Hassan Abed Rabbo said. "He has lost more than half of his body weight, and he feels incredibly weak. His vision is impaired so much so that he could not recognize his wife Dalal Awawdeh as she was visiting him at the Assaf Harofeh hospital."

Human rights organizations also confirmed that the Palestinian prisoner "is at risk of martyrdom at any moment, in light of the occupation's refusal to respond to his demands to end his arbitrary administrative detention, despite the seriousness of his health condition."

Awawdeh, a father of four, is one of several Palestinian prisoners who have gone on prolonged hunger strikes over the years to protest so-called administrative detention, which allows Israel to hold prisoners without charge practically indefinitely.

Thousands of Palestinians are held in Israeli jails. Human rights organizations say Israel violates all the rights and freedoms granted to prisoners by the Geneva Convention. They say administrative detention violates the right to due process since the evidence is withheld from prisoners while they are held for lengthy periods without being charged, tried, or convicted.

Palestinian detainees have continuously resorted to open-ended hunger strikes in an attempt to express outrage at the detentions. Israeli jail authorities keep Palestinian prisoners under deplorable conditions without proper hygienic standards. Palestinian inmates have also been subject to systematic torture, harassment, and repression.

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