

Israel court denies release of Palestinian hunger striker

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Legal observers say the Israeli Supreme Court has effectively handed Khalil Awawdeh a 'death sentence'

Tel Aviv, August 23 (RHC)-- Israel's Supreme Court has rejected an appeal to release a Palestinian detainee on a hunger strike for several months to protest his detention without charge.

Khalil Awawdeh, 40, is protesting being jailed without charge or trial under what Israel refers to as "administrative detention." His family says he has been on a hunger strike for 170 days, subsisting only on water.

"The Supreme Court effectively just gave Awawdeh a death sentence," said Diana Buttu, a Palestinian lawyer and former negotiator. "The Supreme Court rubber stamps everything that the Israeli security services put forward. It is only in very rare circumstances that we actually see that they are pushing back against what the security services are saying."

The Israeli military arrested Awawdeh in December 2021, claiming he was an operative for the armed group Palestinian Islamic Jihad – an allegation his lawyer dismissed. Awawdeh is one of several Palestinian prisoners who have gone on prolonged hunger strikes to oppose Israel's detention-without-trial policy.

Israel claims the policy, which was used during the British Mandate for Palestine, allows the government to hold "dangerous suspects" without divulging sensitive intelligence. But human rights groups say it denies prisoners due process and is aimed at quashing opposition to Israel's 55-year occupation of Palestinian territory.

Legal observers also say the Supreme Court is not an impartial body, but part and parcel of Israel's web of judicial, political and military processes to subjugate and suppress any resistance to the occupation.

"In the case of administrative detention, which is the worst abuse of power of the Israeli security services, you'd expect to see the highest level of scrutiny. But instead, it's pretty much the lowest. What they're trying to do is to push for someone to die from hunger strikes, because they want to see how far Palestinians will push it and what the reaction will be," said Buttu.

Israel is currently holding some 4,400 Palestinian prisoners, 670 of whom are being held in administrative detention, a number that jumped in March as Israel began near-nightly arrest raids in the occupied West Bank.

Awawdeh's family says he has not eaten food since March, when he began his hunger strike. Last week, his lawyer said his condition was deteriorating and filed the petition to Israel's Supreme Court after an Israeli military court rejected a request for his release.

In light of Awawdeh's condition, the Israeli military has suspended his administrative detention while he is hospitalised, allowing his family to visit.

The court said in its ruling on Sunday after examining the classified security information about Awawdeh, there was "solid and strong justification for the decision of administrative detention", and said it hoped the suspension of the detention would "motivate him to accept the decision to end the hunger strike."

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