

UN report shows Israel subjecting Palestinian detainees to torture and abuse

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Soldiers lock a gate at the Sde Teiman detention facility in southern Israel on July 29, 2024, after Israeli military police arrived to investigate the suspected abuse of a Palestinian detainee [Amir Cohen/Reuters]

Geneva, July 31 (RHC)-- Israel has detained thousands of Palestinians during the war in Gaza and stands accused of numerous cases of torture, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights says in a new report.

The 23-page report, released on Wednesday, noted allegations of widespread abuse of prisoners being held incommunicado in arbitrary, prolonged detention. It was published during a tense standoff in Israel as far-right politicians and demonstrators opposed an investigation into alleged sexual abuse of detainees by soldiers.

Based primarily on interviews with released detainees and other victims from October 7 to June 30, the UN report found that since the war began, “thousands of Palestinians” including medical staff, have been “taken from Gaza to Israel, usually shackled and blindfolded”.

As of the end of June, Israel’s prison service held more than 9,400 “security detainees”, the report said, adding that those detained have been “held in secret, without being given a reason for their detention” and without a lawyer.

“At least 53 Palestinian detainees” are known to have died in Israeli detention facilities, it said. It also detailed “allegations of torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including sexual abuse of women and men”.

The report was released during an investigation by the Israeli army, which is questioning nine soldiers over allegations of “substantial abuse” of a Palestinian detainee at the Sde Teiman detention camp in the Negev desert in southern Israel.

Last week, eight Palestinian prisoners who were released by the Israeli army said they experienced torture during their time in Ofer Prison in the occupied West Bank.

Former Palestinian detainees told the UN that they were held in “cage-like facilities, stripped naked for prolonged periods, wearing only diapers.” The documented abuse included food, sleep and water deprivation and being burned with cigarettes.

“Some detainees said dogs were released on them, and others said they were subjected to waterboarding, or that their hands were tied and they were suspended from the ceiling. Some women and men also spoke of sexual and gender-based violence,” the report said.

Palestinian detainees held in Israel are mostly men and boys who are residents, doctors or patients as well as captured Palestinian fighters, it added.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said the testimonies gathered by his office and “other entities indicate a range of appalling acts ... in flagrant violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law”.

The Israeli military rarely explains its reasons for detaining Palestinians in Gaza although in some cases it has alleged affiliation with Palestinian armed groups or their political wings, the report added.

Israel also fails to provide information regarding the fate of detainees while the Red Cross has been denied access to prisons and other facilities.

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