

Israeli authorities tell Palestinian prisoners to use socks as face masks



Tel Aviv, March 23 (RHC)-- Israel has told Palestinian prisoners to use their socks as masks to avoid the deadly coronavirus, which has killed thousands of people across the world. Hamas leader Wasfi Qabba said over the weekend that Israel rejected the request of the detainees' representatives at Megiddo prison to provide them with protective masks and asked them to use their socks instead.

Qabba, a former Palestinian minister of prisoner affairs, warned that depriving the detainees of face masks reflects the Tel Aviv regime's intention to infect prisoners with the virus. He called on the international human rights institutions to provide prisoners with disinfectants and hygiene products to counter the disease.

Abdelnasser Ferwana, chief of Studies and Documentation Unit of the Prisoners and Former Prisoners Committee, said the Israeli Prison System (IPS) mockingly said "let the prisoners use their socks" as safety masks, against the coronavirus.

Palestinian prisoners' rights groups have accused Israeli prison authorities of engaging in gross medical negligence and abuse by not ensuring adequate protection for Palestinian prisoners against the

coronavirus.

Several human rights groups have reportedly warned that the lives of thousands of Palestinian prisoners are now at risk, stating that Israeli authorities have not yet applied precautionary measures to its prisons.

The Palestinian Prisoners Society (PPS) has appealed to international human rights organizations, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to pressure Israel into taking up adequate measures to protect prisoners from the coronavirus pandemic.

The PPS said that Israeli prison authorities had informed them that four Palestinian detainees in the Megiddo prison had contracted the virus. According to the PPS, the prisoners in Sections 5, 6 and 10 of the prison were infected after one of them came in contact with an infected Israeli investigator while being interrogated in the city of Petah Tikva.

"The prison administration has officially informed the inmates about the infections, and everyone is on high alert. Prisoners are facing today the danger of infection from prison guards and investigators," it said.

The four prisoners have reportedly been isolated from the rest of the prison population. The Palestinian Committee for Prisoners' Affairs, however, said Israeli media reports suggesting that four Palestinian prisoners have been infected by the widely-spread coronavirus were inaccurate.

On Wednesday, Palestinian prisoners rejected their meals in protest against the Israeli Prison Service's plans to stop supplying 140 items, including cleaning products, from the canteen and halt medical visits for detainees.

On Saturday, the West Bank-based Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs issued an urgent appeal for the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails amid the virus outbreak. The statement warned a "real catastrophe" in Israeli prisons because of the high number of people diagnosed with the coronavirus in the occupied territories.

It called on the international community and human rights organizations to pressure Israel to release the Palestinian prisoners, particularly the elderly and those suffering from chronic diseases. There are currently approximately 5,700 Palestinians held up in Israeli prisons and detention centers, including hundreds of women and children.

Over 500 of them are being held in administrative detention, without any charge or trial.

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