

# *Palestinian prisoners may go on hunger strike due to poor COVID-19 response*

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Ramallah, March 24 (RHC)-- Palestinians detained in Israel have threatened to go on an indefinite hunger strike to protest Israel's response to the coronavirus pandemic including a ban on meeting attorneys, absence of preventive measures and refusal of protection gear, Haaretz reports.

Prisoners affiliated with Hamas, the group governing Gaza, returned their breakfast and lunches Thursday, and others affiliated with Fatah, the faction that controls the Palestinian Authority, refused some meals during the weekend, Haaretz quoted a source as saying. They plan to launch a hunger strike at the beginning of April, the source said.

Palestinian prisoners have not been tested for the coronavirus and a top member of Hamas, Wasfi Kabha, said authorities in the Jewish state are refusing to deliver them protection means. And dismissing the safety and lives of these prisoners, Israel's Prison Service ordered them to use their socks in place of masks, Kabha said.

He added that most of the diseases Palestinian prisoners suffer from inside Israeli jails are the consequence of a lack of healthcare and hygiene. The cells are not cleaned regularly, let alone

disinfected, Kabha said.

The Palestinian official recalled that 1,000 Palestinian prisoners detained by Israel are currently suffering from health problems, including chronic diseases. This means their lives would be highly endangered if they were to contract the coronavirus. Kabha requested regional and international human rights organizations to pressure Israel to take all the necessary measures that would ensure the safety of the Palestinian prisoners during the pandemic.

Meanwhile, in the besieged Gaza Strip, Palestinian officials announced Saturday the first two cases of COVID-19.

Deputy Health Minister Youssef Abulreesh said the two patients returned Thursday from Pakistan. He added they were quarantined as soon as they arrived and are now being treated in a hospital.

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