

100 Palestinian inmates begin gradual hunger strike in Ofer prison in West Bank

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The photo shows Ofer prison in the occupied West Bank. (Photo by the Palestinian Information Center)

Ramallah, September 22 (RHC)-- A Palestinian prisoners advocacy group says 100 Palestinian prisoners have decided to initiate a gradual strike if Israel continues its repressive measures against the inmates, which were increased following the recent escape of six prisoners from a high-security Israeli jail.

In a statement in Ramallah, the Palestinian Prisoners Society (PPS) said 100 prisoners of all factions at Ofer Prison in the occupied West Bank will participate in the mass hunger strike, after the prison administration reneged on its agreement of stopping the punitive measures against the prisoners, and decided to re-impose part of the restrictions it had slapped recently on the inmates, the Palestinian Information Center reported.

The prisoners will stage their hunger strike gradually to pressure the Israeli prison authorities to backtrack on their punitive measures, which the regime has imposed since the daring jailbreak from the Gilboa prison located in the northern part of the occupied territories through an underground tunnel earlier this month, it said.

The statement further linked the step directly to the prison administration's position in the coming hours, stressing that the gradual strike will be initiated if Israel continues its abusive and retributive measures against the prisoners.

According to PPS, the measures that were imposed recently are transfers, inspection, closing all prisoners' sections, shortening break periods, and closing facilities such as the laundry and the canteen. About 900 prisoners are held in Ofer prison, including children.

In the predawn hours of September 6, Zakaria Zubeidi, a former commander of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade in the northern West Bank city of Jenin and five Islamic Jihad members tunneled their way out through their cell's drainage system and escaped from Gilboa prison.

Over 4,500 Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons faced a repressive campaign by the Tel Aviv regime in the wake of the prison break.

The Israel Prison Service (IPS) sent many Palestinian prisoners into solitary confinement and restricted their access to essential services.

Last Saturday, Israeli media outlets reported that four of the escapees had been arrested in the northern part of the occupied territories.

Following the arrests last week, thousands of Palestinians held protests across the occupied West Bank in support of the six prisoners, particularly those who were recaptured. The protests were held amid fears of an Israeli retaliation that has already repressed hundreds of Palestinian political prisoners.

The heroic jailbreak has come as a huge embarrassment to Tel Aviv and exposed fault lines in its much-hyped security and intelligence apparatus. The Gilboa prison is one of the highly-fortified detention centers in Israel.

The Palestinian resistance groups and several political factions have already warned Israel against causing harm and endangering the lives of prisoners.

On Sunday, the Israeli ministry of military affairs said that the two remaining Palestinian prisoners were apprehended in Jenin. It said the two Palestinians "were caught alive," surrendering without resistance after troops encircled their building.

Meanwhile, the Higher Emergency Committee for the prisoners of the Islamic Jihad Movement has announced that it had taken a number of steps to counter the repressive measures carried out by IPS against the movement's prisoners. This came after reports indicated that Israeli prison authorities are carrying out retaliatory acts against the six prisoners.

In a separate development on Monday, Israeli forces reportedly launched a large-scale arrest campaign in the occupied territories of West Bank and al-Quds. The Palestinian Information Center reported that Israeli troops raided the cities of Qalqilya and Tulkarem, arresting four ex-prisoners after storming and

searching their houses. They also raided the villages of Beit Rima and Ein Yabrud, and arrested two people. Israeli forces stormed the villages of Turmus Aya and Beitunia as well.

Also in Bethlehem and al-Quds, Israeli police arrested a number of people for field investigation. Israel has already launched a campaign of mass arrests and raids in the occupied cities of Ramallah, al-Khalil, Nablus and surrounding villages following the prison break. A number of Palestinian children were also swept up in the latest wave of arrests.

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