

Palestinian prisoners launch boycott of Israeli military courts

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Palestinians hold the pictures of Hisham Abu Hawwash, a Palestinian in Israeli administrative detention who is currently on hunger strike, during a protest in Dura village, near the West Bank city of Hebron [File: EPA-EFE/Abed Al Hashlamon]]

Ramallah, January 4 (RHC)-- Palestinian prisoners held without trial or charge have launched a boycott of Israel's military courts in the occupied West Bank, as prisoner groups warn that one detainee on hunger strike faces "imminent danger of death."

In an escalatory step agreed by Palestinian political parties, the 500 so-called administrative detainees began new year by refusing to show up for their court sessions. The boycott includes the initial hearings to uphold the administrative detention order, as well as appeal hearings and later sessions at the Supreme Court.

Under the banner: “Our decision is freedom ... No to administrative detention,” administrative detainees said in a statement their move comes as a continuation of longstanding Palestinian efforts “to put an end to the unjust administrative detention practiced against our people by the occupation forces.” They also noted that Israel’s use of the policy has expanded in recent years to include women, children and elderly people.

“Israeli military courts are an important aspect for the occupation in its system of oppression,” the detainees said, describing the courts as a “barbaric, racist tool that has consumed hundreds of years from the lives of our people under the banner of administrative detention, through nominal and fictitious courts – the results of which are predetermined by the military commander of the region”.

The boycott comes as the health of Hisham Abu Hawwash – on his 141th day on hunger strike on Tuesday in protest against his administrative detention since October 2020 – continues to severely deteriorate. The 40-year-old is the latest in a string of prisoners who in recent months have refused food and water to demand their freedom. Many of them reached a critical stage and were hospitalised for long periods until Israeli authorities agreed to release them on a fixed date.

“What led the prisoners to take this step [boycott] are the developments in terms of individual hunger strikes – particularly Abu Hawwash and the stubbornness of the [Israeli] intelligence,” Sahar Francis, the head of the Ramallah-based Addameer prisoners’ rights group, told Al Jazeera. “The man is going to die and all they did was freeze the administrative detention order without any guarantee of when it will end,” she continued.

Abu Hawwash, a father of five children from the village of Dura near Hebron, faces “imminent danger of death due to potassium deficiency and arrhythmia,” Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) said on Sunday. “The use of administrative detention and hospitals as detention centers must be stopped,” the group added.

Officials from the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) Prisoners Affairs Commission said on Monday Abu Hawwash is in a state similar to “clinical death”, as he falls in and out of consciousness. The Commission said doctors in the Israeli hospital where he is being held have discussed the possibility of sudden death, or strokes, the consequences of which could be severe.

Administrative detention is an Israeli policy that allows the indefinite detention of prisoners without trial or charge based on “secret evidence” that neither the detainee nor his lawyer is allowed to see. At least four Palestinian children are detained under such orders.

Human rights groups describe Israel’s use of the practice as “systematic and arbitrary” -- and as a form of collective punishment -- noting that its extensive use constitutes a violation of international law “particularly relating to internationally recognized principles of a fair trial.”

“Administrative detention is regularly employed as a coercive and retaliatory measure targeting Palestinian activists, civil society members, students, former prisoners, and their family members,” Addameer says.

In November, administrative detainee Kayed Fasfous ended his 131-day hunger strike after a deal with Israeli authorities to release him two weeks later. Several other prisoners, including Miqdad al-Qawasmi and Alaa al-Araj, agreed to end their hunger strikes after they secured a date for their release.

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