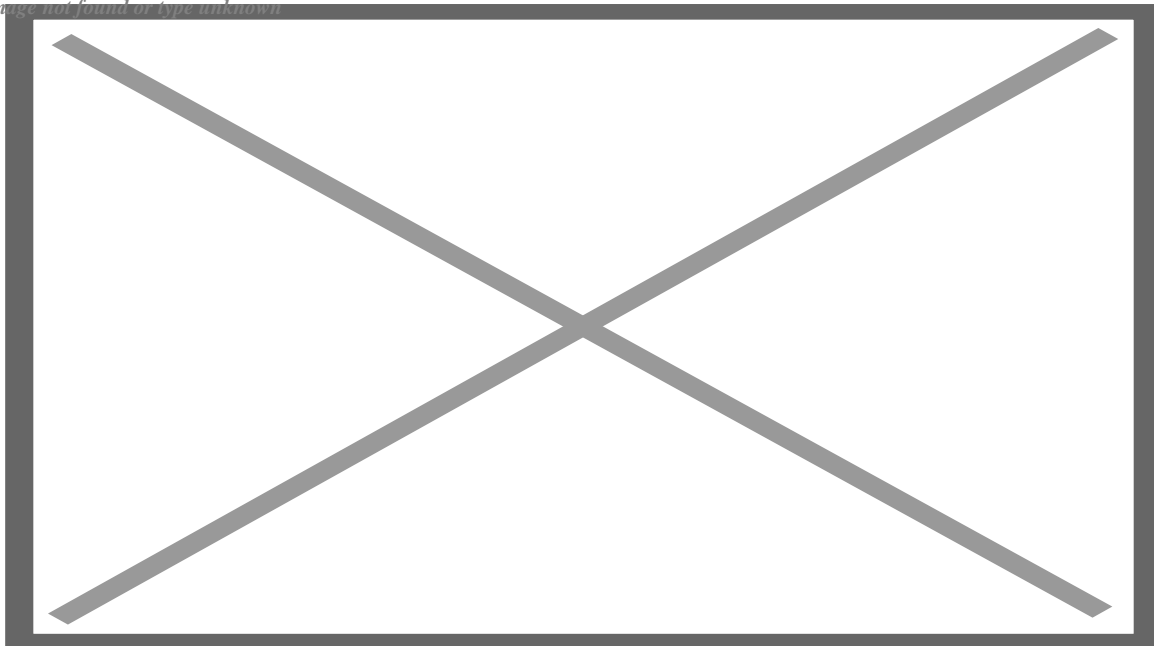# Netanyahu strongly criticizes release of director of Gaza hospital

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"This was a serious mistake. I'll get to the bottom of this if I have to kill every last one of those bastards who let that terrorist doctor go!"

[Not an exact quote, but this is what he was thinking to say...]

Tel Aviv, July 2 (RHC)-- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is awaiting the results of an inquiry into the release of a prominent Palestinian doctor.

The outcome of the investigation by the domestic intelligence agency, Shin Bet, ordered by Netanyahu, into the "serious mistake" of releasing al-Shifa Hospital Director Muhammad Abu Salmiya, who has attracted global attention with claims that detainees from Gaza are being routinely abused, was expected on Tuesday.

The chief of what was Gaza's largest hospital before it was largely reduced to rubble by Israeli bombardment was freed on Monday alongside 54 other prisoners. He was arrested seven months ago as the Israeli military laid siege to al-Shifa, claiming Hamas, the group governing the Palestinian enclave, was using it as a base.

Following their release, which was carried out to free up space in overflowing Israeli jails, according to unconfirmed reports, Abu Salmiya and others alleged that they had faced daily abuse and torture while imprisoned.

Israeli raids and vicious fighting have devastated al-Shifa. All of Gaza's other medical institutions have also suffered damage, provoking concern over access to medical care for the wounded and Gaza's starving displaced population.

Anger quickly erupted in Tel Aviv following news of the release. Far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir branded the move "security negligence".

Netanyahu, under pressure from hardline coalition partners, including Ben-Gvir, swiftly claimed that he was not informed of the planned release and ordered Shin Bet to investigate the matter.

"The release of the director of Shifa Hospital is a serious mistake and a moral failure. The place of this man, under whose responsibility our abductees were murdered and held, is in prison," Netanyahu said in a statement.

The decision was made "without the knowledge of the political echelon", he insisted.

Former war cabinet member Benny Gantz also denounced the move, saying whoever ordered the release should be dismissed. He also called on Netanyahu to "close some government offices to free up space and budget for prisoners."

Shin Bet defended the release on Monday saying it had the agreement of the Israeli military "to free up places in detention centers." It said it "opposed the release of terrorists" who had taken part in attacks on Israeli civilians, "so it was decided to free several Gaza detainees who represent a lesser danger."

Abu Salmiya and others released alongside him have described the grim conditions and "severe torture" that they suffered in Israeli prisons. "Several inmates died in interrogation centres and were deprived of food and medicine," the doctor said, adding that beatings were regular. "Detainees were subjected to physical and psychological humiliation." Others among the 55 released have backed up his claims.

"It is nothing but utter torture," said Faraj al-Samouni. Arrested about six months ago near his home in Gaza, he asserted that the detainees were "tortured, battered and our genitals beaten".

Abu Salmiya was not the only top medical practitioner arrested during the war in Gaza. In May, Palestinian rights groups said a senior al-Shifa surgeon had died in an Israeli jail after being arrested. The Israeli army said it was unaware of the death.

The European Gaza Hospital in Khan Younis said the head of its orthopaedic unit, Bassam Miqdad, was also among those freed on Monday. Hamas has long denied that it used hospitals as a shield for its operations. It has called on the United Nations and other countries to "stop this massacre" of prisoners in Israeli jails.

The Palestinian group has also called on the International Committee of the Red Cross to "reveal the fate of thousands of Palestinian detainees" in Israel.

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