

Scabies outbreak: Palestinian prisoners infected amid Israel's deliberate medical negligence

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Ramallah, November 27 (RHC)-- A new investigation reveals that a quarter of Palestinian inmates in Israeli prisons and detention centers have been infected with scabies in recent months, amid poor sanitary conditions, inadequate ventilation, and lack of basic necessities for the incarcerated.

According to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, the findings contained in the report, which cited the Israel Prison Service (IPS) officials, were the result of a petition filed by human rights organizations. The IPS stated that 2,874 prisoners have contracted the contagious skin disease over the past year, with 1,704 still actively infected.

Scabies is caused by mites, which burrow under the skin and lay eggs. It causes rashes, irritation and further complications in those suffering from the illness.

According to Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), a U.S.-based rights group, prisoners are deprived of washing machines in detention, and that they were not given enough clothes.

"Current data reveals that 430 prisoners in Ramon and Nafha prisons are battling the condition, alongside 596 in Megiddo and 566 in the Ketziot prison facility. Additionally, dozens of cases have been reported in Ofer detention center and other detention centers," the group said in a statement.

As a result of the outbreak of scabies, the IPS confirmed that several meetings with lawyers for prisoners in Nafha and Remon prisons were postponed, and court appearances for affected prisoners were canceled.

Palestinian prisoners maintain that their treatment is deliberate rather than the result of neglect. "When we asked for treatment, they told us that we are terrorists and must die," one prisoner quoted by Haaretz said.

Ameena Altaweel, a researcher at the Palestine Center for Prisoner Studies, stated that Palestinian human rights institutions have persistently raised the alarm about cases of scabies in Israeli jails.

Altaweel said overcrowding was the main reason for the spread of the disease, as well as Israeli measures which were deliberately employed to inflict suffering, such as not isolating prisoners once infection is detected and not providing treatment.

Almost 70 Palestinians, many of them unidentified, have been tortured to death by the Israeli regime in its prisons since October 2023 amid the genocidal war on Gaza.

"There are many prisoners in one room who are forced to sleep on the floor due to overcrowding," Altaweel said. "The infected isolate themselves in the same room in an attempt to contain the disease, but it spreads anyway due to the lack of space," she added.

Israel keeps Palestinian inmates under deplorable conditions without proper hygienic standards. Palestinian inmates have also been subject to systematic torture, harassment, and repression.

Human rights organizations say Israel continues to violate all rights and freedoms granted to prisoners by the Fourth Geneva Convention and international laws. According to the Palestine Detainees Studies Center, around 60 percent of the Palestinian prisoners detained in Israeli jails suffer from chronic diseases, a number of whom died in detention or after being released due to the severity of their cases.

Palestinian detainees have continuously resorted to open-ended hunger strikes in an attempt to express outrage at their illegal detention.



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