

Fate of Gaza detainees in Israel uncertain as 26 named

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A Palestinian man runs on a street leading to a soap factory that went up in flames after it was hit by an Israeli airstrike in Gaza City on Aug. 10, 2014. (AFP/Roberto Schmidt)

BETHLEHEM (Ma'an) -- The number and whereabouts of Palestinians detained in Gaza during Israel's ground operation remain uncertain, as a rights group compiled an initial list of prisoners thought to be held by Israel.

The Al-Mezan Center For Human Rights and their lawyer Muhammad Jabarin said Monday that 26 Palestinians are being held in Ashkelon jail.

Jabarin told Ma'an that some of the detainees have been presented with charges such as belonging to an illegal organization -- referring to Palestinian political parties -- while the rest are undergoing interrogation and have been denied access to a lawyer.

At least 15 Palestinians have been held under the Unlawful Combatants Law and then released, the lawyer said.

The law allows the detention without trial of Gazans for an unlimited period of time and provides even less protection than administrative detention orders, which are issued in the occupied West Bank.

Mahmoud Abu Rahma, the director of communications for Al-Mezan, told Ma'an that three prisoners were released Sunday but re-arrested at the Erez crossing. He says the lack of access means it is difficult to establish why those

named were arrested and how many more are in jail.

Israeli media have hinted that some were released in the Shalit exchange deal in 2011, but Abu Rahma says that the Unlawful Combatants law allows Israeli soldiers to arrest anyone they want until the case is reviewed by an Israeli court.

In some cases, Palestinians are arrested in areas where the Israeli army comes into contact with the civilian population in areas such as Beit Hanoun, where there were numerous reports of home raids in Israel's latest assault.

Initial accounts also suggest that many of those detained underwent physical and psychological torture, Abu Rahma said.

Arbitrary nature of arrests

Addameer prisoner rights group says that at least 250 Palestinians were arrested during Israel's ground operation in Gaza, with 150 detained on July 24 alone.

Randa Wahbe, an advocacy officer with the group, told Ma'an that in some cases Israeli soldiers failed to check the identity of those detained and arrested the relatives of Palestinians recently killed in Israeli attacks.

"Imprisonment is used as a policy of colonization. The ability to arrest as many people as possible moves them away from living normal lives, from building up their society, and fighting for self determination," Wahbe said.

Adalah rights group said that it has no idea about the number of Gaza detainees being held in Israel, having received no response to a petition filed to Israel's Supreme Court.

Laywer Sowsan Zaher told Ma'an that in many cases detainees were forcibly stripped of their clothing and shoes while being arrested, while other photographic evidence indicates that they were blindfolded.

"In many of these circumstances when Israel initiates a war or when they initiate military action, even in the West Bank, such detentions are done in a cruel and degrading way that breaches the rights of detainees," Zaher says.

A large number of detainees were also released after interrogation, a sign that shows the arrests were arbitrary, she says.

Israel's Supreme Court rejected a petition filed by rights group Hamoked to obtain the names of those detained, saying that they would only release information if the family in Gaza requested information about a missing relative.

Given the chaos created by Israel's offensive, it is difficult for families to determine whether a missing relative has been buried under rubble or detained.

During last week's court hearing, Hamoked representatives were not allowed to talk, in an atmosphere described by the group's director as a "circus."

One of the judges also claimed amid the shouting that no other state would treat its prisoners as well as Israel, effectively rejecting claims of illegal arrest and torture.

"They just took whoever they could get their hands on to get information, and maybe if they had to exchange bodies. It was just arbitrary," Dalia Kerstein, the director of Hamoked, told Ma'an.

According to Kerstein, on June 2 there were 201 administrative detainees being held in Israeli jails and by the beginning of August that number had doubled to 449, although it is hard to verify names.

The court told Hamoked that no detainees from Gaza are being held under the Unlawful Combatants Law and are currently in the Israeli Prison Service.

A spokeswoman for the institution, Sivan Weizman, could not provide details about detainees from Gaza, although she said they are spread out over several prisons.

"I can't tell you exactly who we have here from the Gaza operation. All the time there are prisoners, I suppose some of them are still here," she told Ma'an.

"Maybe there are detainees that have not come to the IPS (Israeli Prison Service)," she added.

The names of the 26 detained are as follows:

1. Afif Al-Jarah
2. Abd Al Rahman Ba'lousheh

3. Hassan Al-Astal
4. Mohammad Al-Agha
5. Ahmad Abu Lahia (the lawyer told him he will be released soon)
6. Ibrahim Abu Lahia
7. Mohammad Al-Qadra
8. Hatem Abu Rida
9. Mohammad Al-Najjar
10. Nidal Abu Rida
11. Mohammad Abu Darraj
12. Mohammad Abu Teer
13. Mohammad Abu Rida
14. Issa Al Najjar
15. Iyad Abu Rida
16. Mourad Amir Al Amour
17. Mohammad Salem Al Amour
18. Mohammad Abd Al Aziz Abu Ta'ameh
19. Moumen Al Najjar
20. Jihad Haddad
21. Mohammad Ramadan
22. Samir Al Najjar
23. Abdallah Al Najjar
24. Ibrahim Abu Shaweesh
25. Abd Al Qader Shalouf
26. Abd Al Naser Shalouf

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