

## Field Focus: Subjugating Livelihoods – The Targeting of Palestinian Workers

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Following 7 October 2023, Israel has [implemented](#) punitive measures by revoking work permits of Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank working inside the Green Line, forcing [390,000](#) Palestinian workers to lose their jobs. This, alongside increasing Israeli movement restrictions, have worsened the already dire economic situation, whereas around [67,000](#) workers working in governorates other than their place of residence face heightened difficulties in accessing their workplaces, putting them at risk of losing their jobs. The increased numbers of checkpoints across the West Bank have forced Palestinian workers to take life-threatening risks to cross the Green Line in search of what Palestinians call *Luqmet Al-A'ysh*, or livelihood. In a desperate attempt to earn a living, these workers are relentlessly pursued by the Israeli Occupying Forces (IOF), often resulting in arrest, humiliation, beatings, and targeting, leading to their injury or killing. Since the beginning of 2023, the IOF have killed ten Palestinian workers from the West Bank as they were crossing the Annexation Wall to reach their workplaces inside the Green Line.

On World Labour Day, Al-Haq recounts the stories of three Palestinian workers who were targeted by the IOF inside the Green Line. In doing so, Al-Haq demonstrates how Israel's systematic targeting of Palestinian workers reflects a broader strategy of dehumanisation and domination through subjugation and collective punishment.

### **1. The targeting of two Palestinian brothers on their way to work: The killing of Salim Nasser Hajar, 25**

On 16 December 2023, brothers Saif Nasser Salim Hajar, 19, and **Salim Nasser Salim Hajar, 25**, an engineer graduate, headed to work from their home in Tulkarem towards Barta'a Al-Sharqiya inside the Green Line, where they worked at an aluminium shop. As they crossed the fence of the Annexation Wall and reached the vehicle that was supposed to transport them to their place of work, an Israeli military vehicle obstructed their way, closed off the road and opened fire continuously at them, injuring Salim in the head. In his statement to Al-Haq, Saif recalled:

*“My brother, Salim, and I headed from our home in northern Tulkarm towards Deir Al-Ghusun in order to get to our workplace in the town of Barta'a Al-Sharqiya inside the Green Line through a gate in the Annexation Wall, where there is usually no permanent military checkpoint or Israeli forces present. We arrived at approximately 8:30 am to meet with someone who agreed to facilitate our passage into the territories for 250 shekels per person. There were many workers passing by on their way to their workplaces inside the Green Line. We crossed a fence and reached the lands surrounding an area called Zemer (Al-Marja), located 5 kilometres away from Al-Baq'a Al-Gharbiyeh city inside the Green Line and walked for about 20 minutes until we reached a dirt road. There, we got into private vehicles with*

*Israeli license plates to take us to our workplace. The vehicle drove for about 500 meters when an Israeli military jeep affiliated with the Israeli border police arrived and closed off the road. Three armed soldiers got out of the vehicle and approached us and began firing at us continuously. We disembarked the vehicle and ran towards a rocky mountainous area in order to avoid the gunfire directed at us. Meanwhile, two other Israeli soldiers appeared from the right side, while five others approached from the upper side. The soldiers were firing at us from three directions (north, south, and west), intensively. Here, I fled alone towards the eastern side, while my brother and the others remained at the western side.”*

Saif detailed to Al-Haq what followed next:

*“At around 9:00 am, I saw my brother Salim get shot by Israeli gunfire [from 15-20 meters distance] as he fell to the ground. I cautiously hid for about three and a half hours from the Israeli soldiers in order not to get caught. I was about 10 meters away from my brother where he remained lying injured on the ground and bleeding profusely from the head for about an hour. During this time, the Israeli soldiers approached him, tore off his clothes and removed his shoes. They also arrested the three other young men who were with us, including the vehicle driver. More soldiers arrived at the scene. I tried to call my father, but ended the call before he answered and sent him a message instead, out of fear that the soldiers would hear me: “I am hiding and cannot answer. Do not call.” At around 10:00 am, about an hour after my brother got injured, an Israeli ambulance arrived to the scene. The Israeli soldiers dragged my injured brother and placed him inside the ambulance, which drove off unaccompanied. In the meantime, I stayed at the scene for another two and a half hours, as additional military and police reinforcements arrived and searched the vehicle and our belongings. At around 1:30 pm, I managed to escape quietly. At around 3:00 pm, while I was returning home, I learned of the news of the martyrdom of my brother, Salim Hajar, as a result of the injury he sustained.”*

Saif arrived home at around 4:30 pm, when his father informed him that after calling his brother multiple times, an Israeli paramedic finally answered and told him that his son’s situation was critical. The paramedic asked Saif’s father whether he can arrive at the Beilinson hospital in Petah Tikva to check on his son, to which he answered that that would require a permit from the Israeli Civil Liaison office. Saif’s father received messages on his phone with pictures of Salim’s medical reports in Hebrew containing his personal information, and indicating that he was in critical condition as a result of a gunfire shot to the head fired in response to ‘acts of riot’ according to Israeli claims.

Salim’s body remained withheld in Israeli custody for 43 days. On 28 January 2024, at around 1:00 pm, Israeli authorities released Salim’s body at the Jbara military checkpoint in an Israeli ambulance, accompanied by an Israeli military vehicle. His body was then transported to Thabet Thabet Governmental Hospital in Tulkarem, where doctors discovered that Salim was hit with two

bullets, one in the head and the other in his right shoulder. After a month and a half, Salim's family finally managed to give their son a proper burial in Tulkarem.

## **2. The beating and terrorizing of a Palestinian worker: Riyad Al-Suqiya**

Riyad Ghassan Ibrahim Al-Suqiya, 45, a resident of Jenin and a father and sole breadwinner for his family who works as a cook, was targeted after jumping over the Annexation Wall in an attempt to reach his workplace inside the Green Line on 21 June 2024. In his affidavit to Al-Haq, Riyad described the circumstances that forced him to risk his life and jump over the Wall:

*“I live in the eastern neighbourhood of Jenin, and I am married with four children. I am the sole breadwinner for my family, working as a cook. At around 9:00 pm, on 21 June 2024, I arrived at the Annexation Wall located on the western side of the village of Zeita, north of Tulkarm, to reach my workplace inside the Green Line. Despite possessing a valid work permit issued by the Israeli authorities, I was unable to travel inside the Green Line through the Israeli checkpoints, as Israel has closed them since 7 October 2023. Due to the lack of work opportunities in Jenin and the difficult financial and economic conditions, and my need to work to support my family, I was forced to jump over the Annexation Wall, about 8 meters high, by climbing an iron ladder on one side and going down a rope on the other side [to find better work opportunities].”*

Riyad, along with about 18 other workers were able to climb over the Wall and walk towards Al-Jit town inside the Green Line, when they were surprised with an Israeli pickup vehicle, which was known to other workers. Riyad recalled what followed:

*“I and five other workers took cover among the weeds spread in the area. I do not know the fate of the rest of the workers and where they went. The vehicle approached us, and two members of the Israeli forces got out. It was dark, so I was unable to see them clearly. At first, the Israeli forces fired several bullets in the air and other bullets around us, which hit the dirt ground and splattered dust over my face. Then they asked us to lie on our stomachs and put our hands on our heads. We remained in that position for about half an hour.”*

As more Israeli forces arrived to the scene, Riyad recalled the series of beatings, assaults and dehumanisation, he along with the other Palestinian workers have been subjected to:

*“I heard [one soldier] by the name Omri say to [the others] in Hebrew, “Let's start and turn on the camera.” The Israeli forces began to hurl obscene insults at us. For about 20-30 minutes, they began beating us with their hands and feet, and with their thick, short, black batons. I received a large number of blows with the batons on the back of my feet, and with their feet on my chest and various parts of my body, and so did the other workers. I felt severe pain in different parts of my body, and sustained serious injuries in the chest,*

*both legs and the head. As a result, my body was writhing on the ground in pain. Whenever I tried to ask the soldiers to stop beating me and expressed the extent of my pain, they increased the severity of their blows. Despite the severe pain, the Israeli forces ordered us to stand up and put our hands on our heads, and then led us towards their vehicle, a Toyota pickup. We walked for about 50-60 meters, subjected to more beatings with the batons and the butts of their weapons, until we reached the vehicle, where they blindfolded us and tied our hands behind our backs with plastic ties. We were forced to climb into the back of the vehicle, whose driver intended to make constant sudden stops, causing us to bump our bodies to the trunk's floor, which increased the pain. The back of the vehicle was left open, which meant that we could have fallen out. After about half an hour, we were violently removed from the vehicle."*

Riyad and the rest of the workers were then taken to an unknown location and held until the next day, where they were subjected to ill-treatment and denied food, water, and medical care. Riyad recounted:

*"We were forced to lie on the ground on our stomachs. I did not know where we were being held. After about 15 minutes, I was transferred to one of the rooms. I also felt the presence of some dogs in that room, but they did not attack us. In that room, we were subjected to insults and cursing by the Israeli soldiers, who refused to provide us with water and food, and denied us from using the bathroom. I was not interrogated at any point."*

When Riyad heard the call for prayers, he realized that it was dawn time of the next day in a Palestinian town. At about 5:00 am on 22 June 2024, Riyad and the remaining workers were released on foot from Barta'a checkpoint, south eastern Jenin. They walked for about 10 - 15 minutes, before the IOF soldiers removed their plastic ties and blindfolds and ordered them to leave through the checkpoint's iron gate. Riyad mentioned seeing several Israeli soldiers in their military uniforms. Riyad and others walked despite the severe pain and were taken by a civilian vehicle to the Jenin Governmental Hospital. Riyad suffered bruises, contusions, pain, scratches, and superficial wounds in various parts of his body, including tears in the thigh muscles and bleeding from his various wounds. He remained in the hospital for four days. Until now, Riyad expressed that he still suffers from his injuries and has a hard time walking.

### **3. The capture and assault of a worker from Gaza: Ziad Abu Shahla**

Ziad Yunis Abu Shahla, 48, is a Palestinian construction worker from Khan Younis, Gaza, who had been working in the city of Askalan for about two years until he was taken from his workplace and forced into the West Bank following 7 October 2023, along with many other workers from Gaza. He had a work permit inside the Green Line and visited his family in Gaza every two weeks. On 28 September 2023, Ziad headed to work through the Erez crossing to Askalan, where he used to stay with eight of his relatives in a 3x4-meter-room with a wooden ceiling topped with steel sheets, and one bathroom, above a car shop.

On 7 October 2023, Ziad woke up to loud sounds of explosions. With the onset of Israel's full-fledged military attack on Gaza, Ziad was overwhelmed with intense fear as he worried about his family. He expressed: *"My wife and four children were forced to evacuate the house on the first day of the attack, fearing that they would be bombed, and moved to our relatives' homes. On the morning of 11 October, I woke up and felt that my life and the lives of my eight relatives were in real danger."*

At around 9:00 am on 11 October 2023, Ziad's nephew called their Israeli employer to ask if he could help them get to the West Bank. Half an hour later, the Israeli employer arrived along with two Israeli police officers and told them that they were good workers who had worked for him for two years. Around 10:00 am, the Israeli police took Ziad and his relatives into police vehicles towards the police station. Ziad recalled:

*"As soon as I got into the police car, I felt that they were going to take us to prison. Indeed, the police car carried us towards the three-story building police station, where my relatives and I were taken down to the station yard, and asked to sit on the sidewalk. Then they asked us to hand over all our belongings, including my small bag that contained clothes, money and my identification papers. At approximately 11:30 am, my six relatives and I were taken to the ground floor of the station, where we were placed inside a small iron cell with iron chairs. Two police officers took turns guarding us. I become more anxious and scared. At approximately 1:00 pm, I was called by a police officer, who opened the door of the iron cell, shackled my hands and feet and took me to the third floor of the building, and asked me to sit on one of the chairs in the corridor. A few minutes later, sirens went off and I was taken by the police officer down to the shelter. Everyone in the station was running fast towards the shelter, during which one member of the IOF hit me on my right shoulder. Five minutes after reaching the shelter, sirens went off again twice [and the same drill was repeated], and the same IOF member hit me on my back. [After the third time], I was taken again to the third floor and asked about my personal information, and my fingerprints were taken. I was later taken to another room and asked to sign a white paper with two words in Hebrew on it, which I did. At 2:00 pm, I was taken back to the cell."*

At around 2:30 pm, the IOF took four of Zaid's relatives out of the cell and tied their hands with plastic ties. A few minutes later, Ziad started hearing screams and beatings:

*"At approximately 2:45, I was surprised by the sounds of beatings and screaming. I discovered that a number of Israeli soldiers, accompanied by a female soldier, were severely beating four people, who were also workers from Gaza, and were put in the iron cell with us. At least three soldiers and a female soldier entered the cell and tied our hands behind our backs with plastic ties and blindfolded us, then they began beating us with their feet and hands all over our bodies. One soldier slapped me in the face with both hands. This continued for about a quarter of an hour. I felt dizzy and pain in various parts of my body, especially my head and legs."*

The IOF soldiers continued beating Ziad and the other workers collectively and repeatedly for over two hours. One worker was taken to a separate room and beaten. Ziad felt that death was approaching:

*“Before the soldiers left, one of them sprayed us with cold water. I felt very cold and as if death was near due to the severity of the beating and insults. We stayed in the cell until 7:00 pm, when one of the police officers asked us to stand and began leading us one by one to the bathroom, upon our request. When it was my turn to use the bathroom, the police officer did not undo the plastic ties. Instead, he unbuckled my belt and pulled my pants down. I was unable to use the bathroom, and asked him to take me back to the cell. On my way back, someone, whom I could not see as I was blindfolded, hit me hard in the face.”*

Ziad recounted the severe physical pain he felt in the cell while tied, blindfolded and kneeling on the ground. He also described feeling great psychological pain for not knowing the fate of his relatives who were taken by the IOF to an unknown location, or the whereabouts of his family in Gaza as they endured displacement and bombing. At around 10:15 pm, a police officer took Ziad outside the station and into a police vehicle while tied and blindfolded. Ziad detailed his release from the police station:

*“I felt that there were two people beside me inside the car. It turned out that it was my nephew and cousin. At around 11:30 pm, two police officers took us out of the car, removed the plastic ties and blindfolds. Then I saw another police car carrying the four workers who were with us at the police station in Askalan. One officer pointed to a street through which we can reach Hebron. I realised we were released at Tarqumiya checkpoint. The Israeli forces had only returned my cell phone and ID, but confiscated the bag that was with me at the station, which contained around 1800 shekels.”*

Ziad and six other workers walked for 200 meters until they reached Tarqumiya city, north-western Hebron, at midnight. They were transported in Palestinian vehicles to an events hall in the city centre, and stayed there for a number of days. On 14 October, they were transferred to a governmental building, and those who were injured were taken to Mahmoud Abbas hospital in Halhul city, Hebron. Ziad also learned that his work permit had been revoked by Israel.

At the time of his statement to Al-Haq on 15 October 2023, Ziad did not know the fate of his family in Gaza nor that of his four relatives who were taken at the police station, and stressed his need to be with his family in Gaza.

## **General context**

Since 7 October 2023, tens of thousands of Palestinians who worked in the Israeli labour market have had their permits punitively revoked. Moreover, thousands of workers from Gaza were arbitrarily [detained](#), many were subjected to torture, cruel and inhumane treatment, while some

were held with their whereabouts unknown. The direct and intentional targeting of Palestinian workers after 7 October reflects the dehumanisation of Palestinians seeking a livelihood, and Israel's [exploitation](#) and replacement of Palestinian workers based on its own interests.

For decades, Israel has managed to undermine and de-develop the Palestinian economy by holding it [captive](#). By fragmenting the Palestinian territory, expanding construction of settlements and land confiscation, restricting Palestinian access to and control over their natural resources, and imposing restrictions on movement of people and goods, Israel has created a dependent economy that has forced Palestinians to seek employment inside the Green Line, amounting to '[economic annexation](#)', employed to uphold its apartheid regime over the Palestinian people.

By maintaining a coercive reality that impacts every sector of Palestinian life and [controlling](#) Palestinian livelihoods, Palestinians are trapped in a cycle of dependency as Israel uses economic reliance as a tool of subjugation that undermines Palestinian self-determination and dismantles their social, political, and economic structures. Through these calculated measures, Israel aims to ultimately drive Palestinians out of their lands and erase the Palestinian people.

## **Legal analysis**

As an Occupying Power and administrator of the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), Israel has an obligation to ensure the welfare of the occupied population, including by securing the right to just and favourable conditions of work as stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. In its advisory opinion of 19 July 2024, the International Court of Justice concluded that Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory is unlawful, and that Israel is obliged to end its occupation and dismantle the settlements, explaining that occupation 'cannot be used in such a manner as to leave indefinitely the occupied population in a state of suspension and uncertainty, denying them their right to self-determination'. This also implies that Israel must cease all measures employed in the exploitation of Palestinian workers and control of Palestinians' natural resources and economy.

The systematic revocation of work permits as a punitive measure constitutes collective punishment, and is prohibited under Article 50 of the Hague Regulations and Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The wilful killing of Palestinian workers and wilfully causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or health constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute and the Fourth Geneva Convention, and violate the right to life and the prohibition against torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Moreover, the systematic dehumanisation and discrimination against Palestinian workers also constitute acts of apartheid and persecution as crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Israel's continued violations against all sectors of the Palestinian society, including Palestinian workers, reflect an entrenched culture of impunity within the Israeli society, that is emboldened

by the international community. States must therefore take concrete measures to end Israel's impunity, by holding Israel and Israeli perpetrators accountable for the continuous violations of Palestinians' rights, impose sanctions, enact a two-way arms embargo, cut economic ties with Israel, including by [suspending](#) the EU-Israel Association Agreement, and divesting from Israel. The international community must [make it clear](#) that it will no longer tolerate or remain complicit in Israel's colonial violence and injustice.