

5 October 2011

Mr. Juan Pedro Schaerer – Head of Tel Aviv Delegation

Ms. Barbara Amstad – Head of Jerusalem Mission

ICRC Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Dear Heads of Mission

Re: Monitoring of Palestinian prisoners' hunger strike

As human rights organizations working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, we wish to express our concern about the treatment of Palestinian prisoners who are taking part in the hunger strike and other forms of civil disobedience in the Israeli prisons and call on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to increase its monitoring of the situation.

These acts of civil disobedience, originally launched on 27 September, are being taken up by a growing number of Palestinian prisoners, and are in response to the worsening conditions inside the Israeli prisons. This includes denial of family visits, restricted use of the prison canteen, shackling to and from lawyer and family visits, and the withdrawal of university education and books. Israel has also escalated its use of isolation for 'security reasons', with twenty currently under these conditions, seven of whom were placed in isolation in June. These measures follow a speech given by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 23 June in which he warned that extra restrictions would be imposed on Palestinian prisoners until the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

Given the crucial role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross in monitoring human rights violations against the Palestinian population, and upholding the 4th Geneva Convention which is applicable to the occupied Palestinian territory, we call on the ICRC to pay urgent and close attention to the ongoing hunger strike and acts of civil disobedience inside the prisons. We would like to remind ICRC that these are legitimate actions being taken by the Palestinian prisoners in response to Israel's failure to meet its obligations with respect to protecting the basic rights of prisoners, including the right to food, to education and freedom from torture. Israel's response of further punishing the prisoners merely serves to show its indifference to international law.

We thus request the ICRC to increase its monitoring throughout the Israeli prisons whilst the hunger strike and acts of civil disobedience continue. In particular we would like to make the following demands:

- The ICRC visits all Israeli prisons, particularly those where it is known that prisoners are involved in the hunger strike and/or other acts of civil disobedience, and shares its findings concerning punitive measures and ill treatment by the Israeli authorities with human rights organizations working on this issue.
- The ICRC puts pressure on the relevant Israeli authorities, including the Israeli Prison Service and special intervention units, to desist immediately from punishing the prisoners for their hunger strike and campaign of civil disobedience and stop the abusive use of isolation and other punitive measures.

- The ICRC reminds the Israeli authorities on its monitoring missions that the actions being taken by the Palestinian prisoners are legitimate and in response to Israel's failure to meet its international obligations.

We very much hope that we can work together with the ICRC in continuing to monitor violations inside the Israeli prisons, and calling for an end to torture and ill treatment of Palestinian prisoners.

Yours sincerely

Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association

Aldameer Association for Human Rights

Al Haq

Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights

The Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights 'HURRYAT'

The Civic Coalition for Defending Palestinians' Rights in Jerusalem

Defence for Children International – Palestine Section

The Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)

Palestinian Prisoners Club

Stop the Wall Campaign