

Screaming in the Dark

Life in Israeli Detention

AL- HAQ 2002

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Preface

Operation Defensive Shield was the name that the Israeli military gave to their attack, which was launched against the cities of the West Bank on 29 March 2002 to fight "terrorism". Among Palestinians, the attack, which lasted approximately one month, has since become popularly referred to as "the big attack". During the attack most Palestinian cities and villages in the West Bank were re-occupied, hundreds of Palestinian civilians were killed, and most government and non-government institutions were attacked, vandalized, and looted. Members of the media and medical personnel continued their work, but much of the time found themselves in indescribably difficult situations where their lives were under constant threat. A number of individuals working in both fields were either wounded or shot dead while going about their work. House to house searches were also carried out in each city, and a high level of property damage ensued. During these searches the Palestinian civilian population was exposed to all forms of humiliating and degrading treatment.

This was not the first attack against Palestinian cities. Earlier in the month most Palestinian cities, including Ramallah had been attacked. Following the first attacks Al-Haq had prepared a contingency plan in anticipation of future incursions. When the attacks occurred Al-Haq employee Mr. Yaser al-Disi, the media officer in the organization and a committed human rights activist, stayed at Al-Haq to help in the implementation of this plan. On the second day of the attack Israeli forces took over Al-Haq's office in Ramallah. Mr. al-Disi explained to the soldiers who took over the office that he was working as a human rights advocate by contacting local and international human right organizations to share with them information he received from residents of Ramallah as regards their needs and human rights violations. Despite his statements he was arrested.

No charges were ever brought against Mr. al-Disi. However, the military authorities held him for three months under administrative detention. This type of detention is arbitrary and any Palestinian can be held as an administrative detainee without ever being charged or tried. Since Operation Defensive Shield hundreds of Palestinians have been placed in administrative detention. Al-Disi first spent several weeks in the "Ofer" Israeli military camp, located to the West of Ramallah, before being transferred to the Ansar 3 prison in the Negev.

In his testimony al-Disi describes his experience in detention. He gives meticulous details about the conditions that he and other Palestinian prisoners lived under in the Israeli jails. He also discusses Israeli actions during the first few days of the attack, including the use of schools as military posts and assaults on the medical personnel and Palestinian civilians.

Al-Haq has chosen to publish this testimony because of the first hand nature of the information it contains on Palestinian prisoners in particular and on Palestinians' experience under the Israeli occupation generally. Al-Haq believes that this testimony provides credible information and that it provides an integration of observations from a prisoner, who is at the same time a human rights activist and advocate, thus providing valuable insight into the experiences of the civilian Palestinian population.

Randa Siniora,

General Director, Al-Haq

Ramallah before the attack

The day the Israeli military entered Ramallah the atmosphere in the city was suffocating. An eerie silence mingled with sadness hung over the abandoned city streets, while signs of war hovered on the horizon. Israeli generals had threatened to reoccupy the city, and according to statements made by Israeli politicians to the Israeli media the coming attack would leave Palestinians no safe haven. Everyone was a potential target.

Heavy clouds filled the skies over the city. The weather was bitterly cold. This time the weather forecast had been correct. A cold storm was about to blow. It was the afternoon of March 29th, and I was making my way to Al-Haq's offices in the center of the city as people hurried through the streets, anxious to get home quickly before the Israeli tanks attacked. I entered the office and felt very cold. The offices felt unfamiliar because of the darkness. Using the palm of my hand I groped along the wall and switched on the light. Then I turned on the TV where the news was reporting on the bellicose statements being made by Israeli officials.

I watched TV until midnight and then fell sleep. At about 3:00 am I was awakened by the sound of Israeli tanks and armored personnel carriers thundering through the city streets. The tanks were moving towards the center of Ramallah attacking from all the main entrances to the city. American made apache attack helicopters, which were flying in low over the city, supported them. As the tanks and helicopters advanced towards the city center, they fired heavy machine guns and shells at houses. In the midst of this heavy fire it was just possible to make out the sounds of some weaker gunfire coming from Palestinian fighters. It was impossible for such light weapons to withstand the tanks, and Ramallah was soon completely occupied with Israeli tanks roaming through all of its streets. However, the center of the city remained unoccupied for a brief period, and this gave the Palestinian fighters a chance to move.

When the sun came out the next morning, all of the shops in the city were closed with the exception of a few in the Old City of Ramallah. I saw some young Palestinian men moving between the Old City and the city center, but there were very few.

The occupation forces attack medical personnel

I spent all that day in the office and received many phone calls from people seeking help. Most city residents were completely unprepared for such a situation, and did not have enough stores of food and medicine. The indiscriminate and intensive Israeli shooting and shelling also terrified people. I maintained fairly constant contact with the Red Crescent Society's Media Office, which played a key role in helping the injured. Their medical personnel told me that the Israeli occupation forces had attacked them and had deliberately fired at one of their ambulances. They also said that the situation around Arafat's Office (the muqata'ah compound) was tense. The Israeli soldiers were not allowing the evacuation of injured people trapped in that area. The Red Crescent Society e-mailed me a press release that documented these blatant violations.

The wall of darkness

The situation was critical and Ramallah needed help. Life in the city had come to a standstill due to the bombing and shelling. I was really curious to follow the news, especially as new stories broke. None of the reports mentioned an imminent end to the attack. On the contrary, all the information indicated that the attack was escalating, and that American statements had supported Israel, which was using these statements to justify its own crimes and to present them as a war against "terror".

While I was watching the news in the afternoon the electricity went off. The TV cut out and I was left sitting in the dark. This was a serious problem, as we had no generator in the office to run the computers and other equipment. It was freezing inside the office and I had lost contact with the outside world. I felt helpless, like a piece of furniture or decor.

The rain became heavier and fell continuously. It got even colder. I found some candles to light up the place as the whole city was enveloped in darkness. The candle was not sufficient to light up all the office so I had to carry it carefully around with me to prevent it going out

The bombs continued falling, rocking the city with their explosions as they hit buildings. The Apache helicopters bombarded houses with heavy machine gun fire that was as lethal as the bombs and missiles they were also launching. I felt that the danger was drawing closer to me. The rumble of the tanks was getting louder. The rain continued to fall heavily, and the weather was as cold as at the beginning of

winter. Amidst all of this I felt bitterly alone. An oppressive darkness separated me from the outside world and I could not figure out exactly what was going on around me. My interpretation of events was based on a confused sense of anticipation, influenced by my emotional response to the bombings and shooting. I went into the kitchen and took the food out of the refrigerator and put it on the kitchen table to prevent it from going bad before I went to sleep.

That night was extremely uncomfortable, as I was awakened many times by the sounds of shelling, tanks, and by the cold. I got up very early in the morning and looked out of the window. I saw some young people who seemed to have spent their night on the streets in the rain. It was hard to imagine how they could bear the cold, but they were gone before dawn.

The sun rose and fighting continued nearby. I could now distinguish between the Israeli guns and the Palestinians' responding fire. The sound of the Palestinian gunfire was feeble and receded in the face of the strong and continuous Israeli gunfire. The Israeli soldiers climbed onto the roofs of high buildings overlooking the city, most of which were residential. Their snipers took up positions at the top of these buildings making it impossible for people to move about in the city streets. The day passed very slowly and I had to ration my food and coffee intake. The bread went moldy. As a precaution, I collected some water in pots since the water tanks in the roof could be hit at any time by Israeli gunfire, which would have left me without water.

The attack on Al-Haq

The electricity came back on just before dark and I reconnected the electrical equipment. This made me feel better. I switched on the TV. The images I saw showed that savage atrocities had been committed in the city. I saw the picture of five gray-haired men who had been killed in one of the buildings where they had sought refuge. The news reported that those men had been executed after being arrested by Israeli soldiers. One reporter said that they had worked as Palestinian police. The reporter added that the Israeli soldiers had damaged many houses and institutions in the city, and were attacking and searching all the houses in the city. Everyone, especially children and women, was afraid.

I took advantage of the electricity to charge my mobile phone. Then, as I was opening up my computer to type a few pages and to look up some telephone numbers, I heard loud voices in the building and guessed that soldiers had attacked it. I called Mr. Sha'wan Jabarin, Al-Haq's human rights officer, to let him know what was happening. He said that I should turn all the office lights on and open the door

quickly if the soldiers knocked on it. As soon as I had finished this conversation there was a loud knock on the office door. I went immediately to the inner rooms, turned on the lights and moved towards the door, but before I could reach it the soldiers had it open. I have not yet figure out how they opened it. There were about 15 soldiers, all armed. I stood rooted in place. They aimed their guns at the office doors. Some of them went towards the library while others moved towards me. They were speaking in Hebrew, which I do not understand. I had to walk in front of the soldiers as they entered one of the rooms and had to wait there until they finished their search. Two soldiers remained with me in that room. I lit a cigarette thinking that they would soon be gone once they realized what kind of work we did.

Arrest

Less than two minutes later a soldier of Middle Eastern appearance came up to me and angrily asked me in Arabic to stop smoking. He grabbed me and shouted, "Whose bomb is this?" I told him that I didn't know what he was talking about, and that there was no bomb in the office. I thought that he was trying to make up a charge against me. I explained that al Haq was a human rights organization that documents human rights violations. With my hand I pointed to the books and reports we produce to support my argument. He then said, "Do you want me to bring it here and explode it in front of you?" I told him, "If you have got such a thing, then bring it". He went away angrily and came back accompanied by another soldier who carried plastic handcuffs. He asked me to give him my ID card. He then handcuffed my hands behind my back in a way that forced my palms together. He then left, but quickly returned and asked me the same question. He said, "Tell me whose bomb this is and I will release you". Again, I told him that I knew nothing about it. I did not remember that we had such a thing in our office.1

This sequence of events took about ten minutes, after which I was forced to leave the office walking in front of several of the soldiers. Most of the soldiers remained behind in the office. When we reached the entrance to the office one of the soldiers took a white piece of cloth from a colleague and stuffed it into my pocket. We then went downstairs with one of the soldiers holding tightly onto my shoulder. Other soldiers were inside other offices in the building and were on the staircase. The floors of the building were strewn with broken glass. We stopped at the bottom of the staircase and one of the soldiers took the piece of cloth from my pocket, blindfolded me, and asked me to sit on the ground. A few minutes later a soldier grabbed my back and propelled me forward. I could not see anything. We left the building. It was very cold. I was made to stop near a metal object and a soldier then pushed me forward.

The metal object was an armored personnel carrier (APC). I lowered my head and got in. It was full of metal projections that banged into my

legs. This was both annoying and painful. I did not know where or how to sit and felt as if I was inside a coffin. I tried to lift the blindfold a bit using my knees, but this was impossible as it was too tightly bound. A few moments later the soldiers got into the APC.

The use of schools as detention centers

I didn't know where the armored personnel carrier was going. The soldiers drove for about twenty minutes during which time I lost all sense of direction. My body was continuously battered against the sides of the vehicle. Finally, the personnel carrier stopped and the soldiers took me out. I assumed that I had been taken to an Israeli military post. A soldier held on to me all the time as we walked over rough muddy ground and then up a small staircase of two or three steps. It was raining heavily. A soldier guided me as we walked along a corridor narrow enough that my body often bumped against the walls on each side. Then I was taken to a room and seated on a plastic chair with metal arms. I remained handcuffed and blindfolded with a soldier guarding me. The soldiers often went out of the room and stood in the corridor. I managed to shift the blindfold a bit, which allowed me to see where I was. I could see part of the building of the Union of Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees through the window, so I could identify where I was being held. It was a secondary school that the soldiers had taken over and were then using as a military post.

They put me in an empty room with only a few chairs inside. Rain leaked into the room and made me feel even colder, especially as I was only wearing light clothes.

An hour later the soldiers brought another bunch of prisoners into the room. After separating them into groups the soldiers ordered the prisoners to sit on specific chairs to prevent us from talking to each other. All of us were tired from being deprived of sleep, food, and water.

Detainees are forbidden to go to the toilet

Some of the prisoners wanted to use the toilet. Initially the soldiers refused, but as demands to use the toilet became more frequent, the requests were allowed. However, the soldiers refused to untie our hands, only allowing one prisoner to be untied. This prisoner then had to unzip the other prisoners' trousers and help them urinate. Prisoners had to urinate in this way in front of all of the soldiers in the schoolyard. When I asked a soldier to untie my

hands so that I could urinate he refused, so I asked him to take me back to my place, which he did.

Time passed very slowly. Sharp dagger like pains from cramping stabbed through my arms, shoulders and neck. We were not allowed to sit on chairs and this gave me a backache and made my left leg go numb. We were forbidden to move around which made matters worse. My palms became numb because of the tight handcuffs, which tightened whenever I moved. Some prisoners were crying out with pain. I was worn out by tiredness. I cared neither about hunger nor thirst, as pain overrode everything. Finally I fell asleep exhausted on the chair, but was woken up sporadically by the pain. Whenever I woke up I could hear the soldiers laughing and talking in loud voices. The bombs were still falling on Ramallah.

The journey to the detention center

Dawn broke. I was anxious to leave the military post. The conditions there were unbearable. At about 12.00 am on 1 April 2002, a covered military vehicle parked in front of the military post. I was taken to it with the other detainees. We were all handcuffed and blindfolded. Three soldiers accompanied us. They sat opposite us on a bench pointing their guns at us. They squeezed us into the vehicle so tightly that my bones felt as if they were breaking. It was also incredibly difficult to breathe, as our hands were still bound behind our backs. The journey to the detention centre was over very rough roads. The vehicle was thrown around and our heads knocked against its sides. On a number of occasions the driver intentionally braked in order to slam us against each other. After one hour and a quarter drive we reached an Israeli military camp. We were taken off the military vehicle while the soldiers held us tightly from behind. We were ordered to line up in a straight row. There was a narrow alley behind us, which the rain had turned into mud. From under the blindfold I could see that there were about 100 detainees. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were blindfold. Some were moaning or crying out with pain, exhaustion, thirst or because they needed to go to the toilet. The soldiers beat anyone who uttered a word, kicking them or hitting them with their batons.

I was stood up against a wall and searched. The soldiers found eighteen NIS and a lighter in my pocket, which they returned to me. They also found a pen and kept it. Someone in blue trousers and a dark blue shirt came and put his hand inside my pocket and took my mobile phone. Later when the military released me and returned my belongings they denied that anyone had taken it.

After they had finished searching me they took me up a staircase of about ten steps that led into a heated hall. An officer in blue jeans, a dark blue shirt and sport boots came up to me and untied my hands.

He spoke to me in Arabic and asked me to sit on a chair in the hall. This gave me some relief from the pain of the handcuffs.

I sat on the chair and started studying the hall. This place was a total contrast to the place where I had spent the previous twelve hours handcuffed and blindfolded. I saw numerous prisoners sitting on plastic chairs around me. We all sat facing several small offices and a kitchen where a woman was making coffee, which some of the soldiers were sipping.

A few minutes later the officer came and took me to a small office. I sat on a chair while he sat opposite me behind his desk, which contained a computer with a Hebrew keyboard. A tall, well-built officer sat close up behind me. The officer facing me first asked me for my ID card. I told him that the soldiers had taken it when they arrested me. He then asked me for my full name and the names of my sisters and brothers. He was using his computer while asking the questions, and the other officer kept on interrupting him. The questioning officer then wrote down some Hebrew words and my ID number on a yellow piece of paper. I quickly realized that the Hebrew words were my name. He asked me to keep that piece of paper. The interrogation was over. It had lasted only fifteen minutes. Before I left the officer said, "You will be released in three days when we leave Ramallah." The other soldier said, "You look polite. There will be peace in three days and you will be released."

The officer stood up and took me back to the hall. A man with a camera stood in one of the corners. The officer went away while the cameraman handed me a board with a chalked number on it, positioned me, and took two photographs of me. Soldiers then came and handcuffed me again, but this time my hands were left against my stomach. Then they blindfolded me and took me downstairs. The prisoners were still sitting in the muddy alley. I walked along the alley with the soldiers. I was stopped at the door of a small room. I got a glimpse of a female soldier inside who laughed when another soldier shouted at me asking me what my name was and about my job. I told him that I worked in a human rights organization. He said, "Damn human rights." The soldiers then took me back into the muddy alley and one of them treated me roughly.

Humiliation and suffering

Conditions in the camp were exceedingly harsh. Prisoners were caused to suffer and were humiliated in many ways. It rained ceaselessly. Soldiers were spread out everywhere. Some of them aimed their guns at us. Others made fun of the prisoners by kicking them with their boots. Prisoners were beaten just because they cried with pain. We stayed there for more than two hours.

Finally the soldiers ordered us to stand and line up in a row. They shouted at us and insulted us. All of us were blindfold and could see nothing. The soldiers ordered us to walk in a line while they directed us with their batons. Two buses were waiting for us. We got into the buses but we did not understand what was going on. The soldiers also got into the bus and ordered us to lower our heads. Everyone had to rest his head against the edge of the seat in front of him. The soldiers threatened to kill anyone who moved.

The bus drove for about 30 minutes inside the military camp. When it stopped we were taken out separately and our blindfolds were taken off. There were many soldiers and officers looking at us. I felt insulted when I saw a cameraman filming us while we were handcuffed. These pictures would be used to market us as terrorists. Israeli propaganda is vicious. It turns white into black. People would not be bothered to make the effort to find out the truth.

We walked in front of the TV camera. The soldiers then untied us. In front of us was a yard. A high fence surrounded it with barbed wire on the top. There were four tents inside the yard. Control towers with armed soldiers surrounded the yard. Nearby there was a large area of farmland surrounded by stonewalls. Ramallah stood exactly opposite us. Its skyline appeared bathed in rain. The scene was like a silent tragic painting. Anyone seeing it would have been filled with sadness. Then I realized that I was in the military camp called Ofer, which was a detention center that Al-Haq's lawyers had spent much time investigating. It had been opened as a prison at the beginning of 2002 to absorb new Palestinian detainees, as other jails had almost reached their full capacity.

Inside the tented prison

It was about 4pm when we entered the section where we were to stay, which contained around 150 to 170 prisoners. We did not know each other. We all spread out to have a look at the new place. The earth was muddy and the tents were old and shabby. Strong winds blew them about in all directions. Those tents were not fit for human beings. They offered no protection from the rain. There was nothing to sit on. The luckiest amongst us found some pieces of cardboard, which they used to cover areas where rainwater had gathered in puddles inside the tents.

A few hours later the soldiers brought us some Mishtahs 2, gomys3 and blankets. There was not enough to go round. Five prisoners had to share three mishtahs and three gomys and each prisoner only got one light blanket. No sooner had we put them on the ground than the

blankets, mishtahs and gomys got soaked. We had to move very carefully inside those tents. The reality was that we were living in a swamp.

We spent about one week in this section where we exposed to all forms of humiliation and degrading treatment. The tents were on the verge of collapsing due to the strong wind and rain. We frequently had to hold down the sides of the tents to protect them from wind and had to hang onto the side tent poles, which swung about all the time. Prisoners sat about frustrated and with nothing to do. The problems with the tents, the rain, the wind, and the soaked mishtahs, gomys, and blankets all added to the strain of detention. I remember that the central tent pole collapsed once and hit one of the prisoners on his head giving him a severe headache.

These conditions really affected us. We often slept out of emotional exhaustion not because we wanted to sleep. It is difficult to describe what it is like sleeping while rain falls on your face and soaks your covers. The weather was freezing, so we rarely took off our shoes. Our life was very close to that of primitive man. The only difference was the torture and humiliation we were exposed to. I recall that I and some other prisoners could not sleep for more than two days, as we had nothing to sleep on. We were reduced to putting some soaked cardboard on the muddy earth to sit on. To get some rest we had to sit leaning back to back in pairs. We would spend all night sitting like that. I often lost control and fell asleep. When the sun rose we managed to sleep for a short time in spaces that others vacated.

Food

The food we were given was very poor. It was insufficient to provide us with the calories the body needs. In addition, it was not served on a regular basis. The first meal consisted of a small carton of yogurt, one tomato, one raw frozen piece of schnitzel and small piece of matzoh⁴. The same food was served up for the second meal with the addition of some apples. Eventually we were divided into groups of six or seven men and each group shared the following portions for meals:

* Breakfast: one carton of yogurt, two to three tomatoes and sometimes two cucumbers.

* Lunch: five pieces of frozen raw schnitzel, three tomatoes and (sometimes) three to four apples. Sometimes they brought pieces of meat instead of schnitzel. We did not know what the meat was, but we had no other choice.

* Supper: This was exactly like the breakfast. Sometimes the yogurt was replaced by cream cheese.

We were never given hot drinks or cooked food during our imprisonment in that military camp. The schnitzel was solid and covered with ice. This caused health problems for many prisoners. Some suffered from constipation or lost a lot of weight, and others got sore throats. Many prisoners caught flus and colds due to the lack of health care.

Roll calls: Another form of humiliation

Prisoners were counted three times a day. I had heard about this process before my detention and now I was living it. The roll call is a very humiliating process in which soldiers display great brutality and aggression. Whenever the soldiers wanted to count us we had to exit from the tents and sit down in a row in the muddy yard in front of the tent. We had to face forward while the soldiers shouted at us "Rosh Limala, Rosh Limata" lower your head, look straight forward while they trained their guns on us.

Depositing our belongings

On the third day in the tents, a large number of soldiers arrived with a list of our names. They shouted at us to get out of the tents, handcuffed us and ordered us to line up in a row. Everyone had to hold onto the back of the prisoner in front of him. While we were walking the soldiers moved around us with their guns trained on us. The ground was thick with mud. We walked a short way until we reached an area containing barracks. The barracks were set up close to each other to form a wall. There was a large tent nearby in front of which some soldiers were positioned. The soldiers ordered us to stand against the side of the barracks, raise our hands above our heads and spread our legs. They then searched us very carefully. Our bodies and faces were touching the side of the barracks. Whenever they finished searching someone, they untied his hands and led him into the tent, which was vast. Inside the tent were several officers and soldiers were sitting behind a number of wooden tables that were laden with files and papers. Some other soldiers stood opposite on guard. The soldiers asked me to empty my pockets. The only things I had with me were a lighter and some cards that they took, and eighteen NIS that they allowed me to keep. They gave me a receipt. I asked them about my mobile phone, but they said they knew nothing about it. I told them that an officer had taken it out of my pocket after I had been brought to the military camp. One of them said, "You can ask the DCO about it".

The medical examination and Doctors

After depositing our belongings they told us to go to a bearded man in a military uniform with a stethoscope hanging round his neck. This was the doctor. I approached him and he asked me in English, "Have you got any health problems?" I told him that I had pains in my stomach and back, which had only started since my detention. He ignored what I said and placed his stethoscope on my chest as I was sitting on a wooden bench in front of him. He then placed the stethoscope on my back and wrote some notes in a file. I was then led out of this tent and handcuffed. I was the last prisoner to leave the tent. We were then taken back to our tents.

I saw doctors in that military camp carrying machine guns. I believe that working in the medical profession and carrying a gun are incompatible. The first is a humanitarian vocation while bearing arms is totally different. If doctors carry guns this is bound to create a psychological barrier between the patient or injured prisoner and the armed doctor.

While I was in the Ofer military camp I saw four Palestinian medical staff who had been arrested. One of them was a doctor wearing a white gown with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society badge. These four had been arrested while they were on duty. I saw some Water Authority workers who were wearing dark blue uniforms. They had been arrested whilst repairing the water network that had been damaged by Israeli attacks. I met two men who worked as guards in the Arab Bank in Ramallah. There was also a journalist who had been severely beaten by the soldiers and some of his ribs had been broken. He had been detained whilst working in one of the local radio stations.

The riddle of the bomb is solved

On the second day of my detention I started to think over my detention. It was like a slow motion film inside my head. I was preoccupied with the soldier's questions about the alleged bomb at Al-Haq. I was puzzled as to why they wanted to throw such accusations at me, as the accusations were so far removed from the focus of my work. It was also incompatible with Al-Haq's mission as a human rights organization. I was surprised that they had not questioned me about the bomb during my detention.

I was initially confused, but I finally worked out what it was all about. The soldier's claim about the bomb was misguided, as we had no bomb in the office. However, I remembered that we did keep a disarmed missile in the office as part of our documentary evidence. As a human

rights organization we document human right violations we observe in the Occupied Territories. Missiles were one of the means the Israeli forces used to demolish homes in the Occupied Territories. An Israeli helicopter had launched the missile found by the soldiers at a Palestinian home in Hebron in 1988 during the previous Intifada, but it had failed to explode and an Al-Haq fieldworker had found it. Together with publications and pictures it provided concrete evidence for the outside world of the atrocities committed by Israelis against Palestinians. Alas! How could I forget this; had I remembered it, I am certain that I could have proven that the missile was used as documentary material and so could have avoided being detained. However, it wasn't my fault that I didn't understand what the soldier had been talking about. It was the soldier's fault for not showing me the missile.

Moving through the Prison

We were often transferred between different parts of the prison. Each time we were transferred we were subject to a careful search that took hours. Once the prisoners had gotten used to the place they were in they were moved to another section. This was one of the methods the prison administration used to break down prisoner solidarity. They used buses when they wanted to transfer us from one section to another. Every time we were handcuffed and bound, and sometimes our eyes were covered. It goes without saying that the soldiers' treatment was rough and cruel. The handcuffs were fastened as tightly as possible and stopped circulation. The ridges and notches of the plastic handcuffs cut deep into the prisoners' skin. In addition, we had to bow our heads as low as we could get them.

Transfers took a very long time, usually between 4-6 hours, even though the distance between the sections was not that great. Again this practice was intentional as it gave the soldiers an opportunity to torture and insult the prisoners.

In the tank parking lot

At about 1:00 am one night about a week into my detention we were transferred by bus. The buses drove nonstop for more than five hours. As usual we were handcuffed and blindfolded. We did not know where we were going. At about 6:00 am the bus parked. It was still dark. The soldiers pushed us off the bus with their fists. We entered a place that I did not recognize and moved inside it very slowly with no one guiding us. I thought that the soldiers were behind us as they were screaming abuse at us. I heard one of the prisoners saying, "Take off your blindfolds". One of the prisoners came and helped me get rid of my handcuffs. We were exhausted and tense due to a lack of sleep. It was impossible to sit on the ground, as it was earth and full of

black greasy patches. We realized that we were in the tank parking lot.

The tanks had left this barracks to go to attack Ramallah and shatter the peace. The barracks was a structure of latticed metal tubes and posts. Three sides were covered with corrugated aluminum plates. One of the sides was covered with a high barbed wire wall, and the barbed wire stretched across the other three walls. The roof of the barracks was covered with asbestos. In front of us was a long alley running along the high wall, which was used by soldiers and military vehicles. Some soldiers stood watching us from under a tarpaulin that also covered a table and some chairs. A machine gun was mounted on a concrete platform standing in the middle of the barracks. The soldier on that platform often pointed the laser sight fixed on his gun at our heads for fun. Snipers use this type of sight to highlight their targets.

The barracks were designed so as not to let in direct sunlight, so we spent several days with no sun at all. We had lost our sense of direction during our trip to this location and had to guess where we were. After we had spent a few hours standing up the soldiers ordered us to sit down so that they could count us. They forced us to do this, and shouted at and insulted any prisoner who could not sit on the hard earth. They counted us very slowly. When they finished counting they ordered us to continue sitting on the ground for another count. When the counting game finished we immediately stretched out on the dirty ground. At night the soldiers brought us some mishtahs and light blankets.

There were too many prisoners and the barracks were overcrowded. It was difficult to move about inside. The alley near the fence was the only passageway. At one point there were about 300 prisoners inside the barracks. Barbed wire was stretched down the middle of the barracks to separate us. There was so much overcrowding that everyone had to stay put in his own place for about 20 days.

The Toilets

For the first four days in the barracks, no one could use the toilet, as there were none inside the barracks. Any prisoner who wanted to relieve himself had to contact the soldier on the platform through the Shawish5. Whether or not you got permission depended on the particular soldier's mood. The prisoner was then taken to the portable toilets outside the barracks, and was of course guarded all the time by armed soldiers. The soldiers usually kept on knocking on the toilet door with their batons and legs to urge the prisoner to hurry up if he took more than two to three minutes. One prisoner told me that he was unable to relieve himself due to the psychological impact of the soldiers presence and their shouting. Because of this

treatment, during the first four days many prisoners preferred not to use the toilet.

On the fifth day the soldiers brought three portable toilets and we took them inside the barracks. The toilets were made in America and were like plastic water reservoirs. They were not connected to any pump or tube and had to be baled out by a pump when they became full. Bringing them into the barracks was a disaster as they filled up every two days. The pump was never brought in time to bale them out. Our life was made a misery because of the smell and the accompanying negative health effects. The rising temperatures made things worse as mosquitoes and flies were beginning to converge on the area.

Showers

There was a small wooden room in one of the corners of the barracks containing some taps and basins. The water couldn't drain out of the basin and leaked onto the ground in puddles soaking our sleeping places. Some water pumps hung from the ceiling of the barracks. Thinking that we could use them for showers, we covered the ground with blankets. Unfortunately there was no hot water. In order to get hot water the soldiers would have had to switch on the gas boilers just outside the barracks, which they refused to do. So, during a whole first month of my detention I only took two showers. For the first twenty days there was neither warm nor hot water. We had no spare clothes with us, and were thus forced to wear the same dirty clothes all of the time. We became very anxious about contracting skin diseases. Whenever one of us started itching all of us became worried.

The treatment of injuries in prison

There were some injured prisoners among us in the barracks, including the following:

* Abdallah, a policeman of around 20 from Gaza who worked in Ramallah: This young man stayed stretched on his back on his sleeping place. He wore the green gown, which is typically worn by the sick in hospitals. Other prisoners took care of him. He had been hit in the stomach by a bullet from a heavy machinegun. He could not stand up or walk without the help of others. He walked very slowly. If he needed to go to the toilet one of the prisoners helped him. His wounds often bled.

It all depended on the soldier's whim as to whether he would be taken to be treated. It was extraordinary that injured men were held as prisoners when they should have been in hospitals receiving medical care. Instead they were subjected to injustice and humiliation. Additionally, the diet of the injured and sick was no different than anyone else's and was poor, unbalanced, and not conducive to restoring their health.

* Maher, a journalist from Ramallah: He was arrested while working in one of a local radio stations in Ramallah. The soldiers severely beat him when they arrested him and broke some of his ribs. He told us that the soldiers had plotted against him. They wrapped a piece of cloth with the word "hamas" written on it around his head. They wanted to execute him. They were only prevented from doing this when an officer intervened.

Maher was with us in the barracks throughout my stay. He could never sleep. He had to remain seated all the time. We filled a box with paper and cloth and put it behind him so that he could lean on it. He had to sleep in an L shape. He knew that any strong or sudden movement would puncture his lungs. The doctors brought him some painkillers, but they refused to give him any medical treatment.

* One of the prisoners suffered a heart attack and suddenly collapsed. He was taken to the Hadassa Hospital in Jerusalem. A few days later he was brought back to prison. He had to pay for the treatment expenses himself. He said that the soldiers stayed with him throughout his stay in the hospital.

Some of the staff working from the International Committee of the Red Cross met those who were injured and sick.

Farce: the "trial"

On 14 April 2002, a few days after I had been arrested, an officer carrying a notebook and accompanied by a group of soldiers came to us and read out some numbers. My number was one of them. He ordered the prisoners whose numbers he had read out to line up and leave the barracks. We were handcuffed and forced to walk in single file. We then got into a bus that had curtains covering its windows and were ordered to lower our heads. The bus traveled for about an hour stopping many times. It finally parked in a place where there were three tents erected near to each other at the edge of a military camp. We got off the bus and the soldiers ordered us to sit on the ground. We were thirsty, but the soldiers refused to bring us water. The

handcuffs were very tight. We asked if they would loosen them, but they also refused this request.

A soldier came out of one of the tents and called me by my number. I walked in front of him while he pointed his gun at me. He ordered me to stop at the entrance of the tent. Once there, another soldier approached me and took off my handcuffs. I had to bend my head a bit to enter the tent. A well-built man in blue was inside sitting behind a table. He wore a Yarmulke, which indicated that he was religious. He was clean-shaven whereas I had a long beard, as we had no razors. I realized that he was a judge. A female soldier in military uniform sat beside him with a computer in front of her to record the trial. Behind another table sat someone in military uniform. He was the prosecutor. He did not utter a single word. There was a translator whose mother tongue was Arabic.

The judge asked me to introduce myself and I gave my full name. Throughout the trial I had to stand surrounded by soldiers. After stating my name the judge delivered his judgment, which was three months administrative detention. He then said, "Another hearing will be conducted on 21 April to consider the delivered judgment. It might be approved or revoked." The translator told me what the judge was saying. The judge then added, "So far we have no evidence about you. Therefore, we will give the prosecutor a chance to find out if there is any evidence."

When the judge finished speaking I said, " My detention is illegal and unjustified. There is no charge against me and I request my release and I expect you to release me."

They asked me whether I had an attorney. I told him "No". He said, "You can have one." Since I could not contact anyone outside, I did not pay much attention to this. The hearing adjourned. The soldiers took me to the entrance of the tent and handcuffed me again. I was then taken back to the bus. We had to wait until all the trials were finished. We arrived back at the barracks towards the end of the day after a very long journey.

When the date of the second hearing arrived the soldiers who accompanied us to the court were extremely aggressive. They continuously insulted and shouted at us as we traveled to the court where we were to be tried. I was the third prisoner to appear before the court. The soldiers took me off the bus and I walked towards the entrance of the tent. I sat next to two other prisoners, one of whom understood Hebrew fluently. We heard the judge talking to someone on the phone. He said, "I have three empty files in front of me for three prisoners. The files do not contain anything that convicts them. I have no choice except to release them." He was talking about the three of us. We did not know what the person on the other end of the

line said, but the prisoner beside me said, "The judge is being put under pressure. It seems that the person on the other end of the line told him to make up any charge and to approve the previous sentence." We spent about fifteen minutes in front of the court. Then we were taken to the bus again and waited there for about four hours. The weather was very hot. We were handcuffed and could not even use our shirt sleeves to wipe away our sweat. We were given no water to relieve our thirst.

A soldier eventually came and called out my number. He took me off the bus and let me sit down in front of the tent. When the judge was ready for me to go into the tent-court, the soldiers took my handcuffs off and led me inside. It was the same judge. I stood about four meters away from him on the earth floor of the tent. The judge said "Yaser al-Disi, do you remember that you were here on 21 April and that you were sentenced to three months administrative detention?" He continued "We decided to postpone the approval of the delivered sentence until 27 April, as we don't yet have any evidence against you. The prosecutor will gather his evidence by that date. I had nothing to say. I was convinced that it was a prearranged farce. The soldiers took me back onto the bus.

The bus moved off and the soldiers warned us that there would be a high price to pay if anyone moved. We were forced to lower our heads. I was sitting in the front of the bus in the seat nearest to the soldiers. A soldier moved very close to me and asked me to repeat the following statement after him, "hummus fool7, I love mishmar kvol8". I refused to repeat it and did not talk to him. Then the soldier took out a penknife from his pocket and held it against my face. He then said something in Hebrew, which I did not understand and said, "Talk". I insisted that I did not understand what he said. I moved my face but he shaved the flat of the penknife down my cheek. Then he went away. The other prisoners witnessed this. A few minutes later the soldiers hit Muhjahed who was sitting next to me on the head with a baton for no reason. The soldiers kept on provoking us until we got back to the barracks.

The date of the third hearing came due. I felt frustrated by the Israeli court and its proceedings. I was convinced that the trials were no more than a formality. The judges were neither impartial nor just.

The soldiers took me off the bus. I sat down in front of the tent waiting to appear before the court. Then I caught sight of the lawyer Sahar Fransis, who works for Addameer9. She told me that she would represent me.

The soldiers then took me back to the bus without appearing before the court. Later I was taken before the judge who made the same

comments as in the previous hearing. When he had finished talking Sahar spoke with him in Hebrew. She said that I had been arrested while at work and that my work was of a humanitarian nature. She added that I had recently returned from abroad where I had completed my studies, and that I had been busy working ever since.

When she finished her defense, Sahar whispered to me, "There is no charge against you. Administrative detention is not based on a specific charge or conviction. It is usually based on a confidential file that we are not allowed to see. The judge asked me to leave and the soldiers took me out for about ten minutes. When I returned the judge said, "I now have the confidential information. The previous judgment is approved. You are sentenced to three month's administrative detention starting on 31 March and ending 10 July 2002." I asked whether my lawyer could look at the confidential information the judge claimed that he had received. He adamantly opposed this suggestion. My lawyer then asked him to include the previous period of detention as part of the sentence. He agreed that I could be released on 1 July. Then I was taken back to the barracks.

Transfer to open sections

On 28 April a large group of soldiers came to the barracks in buses. They handcuffed us, searched us, and took us onto the buses. The curtains of the bus windows were pulled down, and we had to lower our heads. The bus stopped after an hour's drive in front of a yard divided into square areas surrounded by barbed wire. The yard was empty, and we were left in it. This was the first time we had seen a sunset since being placed in the tank barracks. We felt calmer as we could see Ramallah from there. The soldiers brought us four tents to erect on the ground, which was covered by a layer of concrete. We put them up and divided ourselves into tent groups on the basis of friendship.

The period we spent there was better in a relative sense. We could sit in the sun and move around in the yard even though it was small. I vividly remember one particular incident that happened there. On 29 April, a soldier who seemed to be of Indian origin and who wore a Yarmulke cocked his gun and pointed it at one of the prisoners. He wanted to shoot him, but an officer who was sitting behind him prevented him from firing. We discussed this incident among ourselves. We concluded that this soldier was either mentally disturbed or had a deep hatred for Palestinians. He repeated the same action a day later.

To the Negev

On 30 April, while I was sitting with a group of prisoners talking and waiting for the sun to appear from behind the clouds I received some bad news. An officer carrying a piece of paper in his hand came up to us and read out a series of prisoners' numbers. I heard other prisoners close to the officer saying my number, and they waved me over to them. After reading out the numbers the officer said, "Get ready. You will be transferred to the Negev in ten minutes." 10

We said quick goodbyes as we had only limited time. Four buses were waiting for us. We were again handcuffed and blindfolded and put into the buses. We knew that our journey would be exhausting. We were given nothing to drink or eat. In addition we had had no breakfast that day. The soldiers in the bus forbade us to raise our heads. They shouted and threatened to hit anyone who moved.

The journey to the Negev took about four hours. During this time our minds were full of images of the desert, which forms one third of the area of historical Palestine. The image of that desert was beginning to imprint itself in our brains. This desert would be our exile.

The Ansar 3 prison, also known as Ktse'ot, appeared on the horizon. We had been uprooted and brought to this desert. It was extremely hard to leave the sturdy, well-established white houses of Ramallah, which were visible from the Ofer military camp for this deserted place.

Our handcuffs and blindfolds were tightly fastened and it was difficult to even glance outside of the bus. The soldiers made fun of us, and we finally decided to challenge them. Just as the sun was about to drop below the horizon and the glow of a crimson sunset filled the sky we all removed our blindfolds. The soldiers threatened to punish us, but we were able to seize our chance in the brief moment that existed between our assertion and their resumption of control. In the distance reflecting the rays of the sun I could see the shadows of barbed wire surrounding a vast area in the desert.

Obsessions and thoughts

The bus stopped, the prison gates opened, and we were swallowed up into the prison. We were surrounded by wire. I thought to myself that

this prison could strangle people and steal their lives, but I didn't give into these feelings and they soon disappeared.

As usual, we were subject to the routine of ID checks, body searches, preparation of files, and medical checks. These procedures continued until midnight, after which we were put in section "B4", which faced the place where inspections took place. The night was calm and the sky clear. There were two stars near the moon. We looked at them and they gave us a sense of inner peace and eased the detention a little.

We were too exhausted to even check out the place. I was struck by the thickness of the wire surrounding the prison and this depressed me. I also noticed a small tree whose branches had withered due to lack of water. Apparently the soldiers ignored it as it grew inside the section where we were held.

The kitchen workers¹¹ brought us some food and hot tea, something we had not had for about a month. We ate some food, drank the tea, and then went to sleep quickly on the earth as we were worn out. In the morning soldiers making a din woke us up. They wanted to do a roll call. We were sixty prisoners. Unlike the timid sunshine of Ramallah, here the heat of the sun bore down on us, and we were at the mercy of mosquitoes.

It took us a day to figure out how the prison was organised. It consisted of five sections surrounded by wire and metal cages. The wire was over four meters height. Every section consisted of four units. Every unit contained sixty prisoners divided between three tents. Some of the sections were empty. All the units in sections ÒÀÓ and ÒDÓ were full, while only two units out of four were being used in section ÒBÒ where I was held.

Unit "B4"

In that Unit there were three faded, shabby, dirty and torn tents standing in a straight line. They had withstood the desert storms for a very long time. I often thought that they must have been there since ancient times. There was a yard about 250 metres sq in front of the tents. This was where the prisoners spent the afternoon even though it was too small for the full number of the prisoners.

There were no sanitary facilities in the sections, only tents and toilets. Prisoners had to use the toilets to take showers. The

toilets were made out of a box that had been divided in three sections, each with its own door that locked from outside. The box was very small. One could not move about inside it. Each of the three compartments was about one meter square in area and 1.5 meters high. The toilets were filthy, not because the prisoners didn't try to clean them, but because of the lack of cleaning materials and due to their design. They were constructed of metal plates and wood dividers, which allowed rats to run free and multiply. The heat generated by the metal sides and the puddles of water that formed were a breeding ground for a host of insects. Despite frequent requests made to the prison administration during my stay in Ansar 3, the administration failed to provide any cleaning materials for the toilets. The garbage containers were also located near the sleeping sections, and I leave it up to you to imagine the health risks these containers created.

Sewage effluent overflows

Once the sewage pumps broke down and the effluent overflowed into our section. The sewage plant outside our section became blocked, and its effluent covered part of the section. Those two days were foul. The prison administration did not deal properly with the problem. Some prisoners, guarded by soldiers, went out to fix the problem but they failed. The same thing happened the next day.

Isolation

Prisoners in Ansar 3 prison usually feel that they are isolated. This feeling overwhelmed me as soon as I heard that we were to be transferred there. The name of that place conjures up images of exile. This prison is located in the Negev desert in the south of historical Palestine along the border with Egypt. It was established there well away from the eyes of a free world, which rejects occupation and the oppression of people. When you are there no one hears you. When you cry out, you cry out alone. You feel how bitter it is to be powerless. You also experience the weakness of a world that fails to end this disaster. Under these conditions prisoners identify with refugees and understand what it means to be a refugee.

Everything in that prison was carefully designed to pressure prisoners. The prison is surrounded by barbed wire. Enormous mounds of earth are piled up behind the wire. Military vehicles move over the mounds that are about ten meters high. Prisoners cannot see anything outside. It is truly isolated. I believe that the aim of the barbed wire is to break a prisoner's spirit by isolating him from the real world. Therefore, I was not surprised by the hatred the soldiers in the prison displayed towards trees and plants. The color green was taboo. The soldiers often got together to cut a tree's branches or

uproot a plant they found somewhere in the area. I finally came to the conclusion that the soldiers only wanted one color to exist in that area, gray. They realized the positive effect green leaves have on people's psyche. Therefore, trees were excised from the prison and were replaced by barbed wire. There was only one tree inside our section. The prisoners took care of it until it became taller than the wires.

Lack of contact with the outside world compounded our isolation. We were not allowed to receive visitors, and were forbidden Arabic newspapers. We only had one radio, but its reception was poor and its batteries were low. The Israeli attacks in the West Bank against Palestinian civilians had not stopped when we left for the prison, and this fact kept us preoccupied, as we had no news about our families, relatives, and friends. The isolation encouraged the circulation of rumors.

Prisoners as training targets

The prison is located inside a military camp where soldiers trained continuously, so we lived in a situation similar to what we had experienced outside. We could hear the sound of bombing, and shooting ranges were located close to us. F-16s continuously over flew the camp at very low altitudes, and we could see precisely how large they were. This reminded us of the damage they had wrought in Palestinian cities and camps.

Groups of armed soldiers walked in the alleys inside the prison, patrolling the prison continuously. Their behavior was very unsettling. We began to feel worse when we became training targets for the soldiers. In the course of a short period our section was twice transformed into a training field. A battalion of about fifty fully armed soldiers, led by an officer, attacked our section. Every soldier took up a position and did things I could not understand as I had little military knowledge. These operations lasted for more than twenty minutes each. We thought that the soldiers were being trained in preparation for some later attack on the section, especially as we had often complained about the food, the long time that roll calls took, as well as the whole concept of administrative detention.

Previously I referred to the conditions of the tents in which we slept. Sleeping arrangements were no better than the tents. Every prisoner was given a mishtah that was only a few centimeters thick and a thin khaki-colored piece of rubber to cover the mishtah. The piece of rubber was not thick enough to cover the gaps between the pieces of wood out of which the mishtah was made. As a result, many prisoners developed backaches and rheumatism. The condition of those who previously suffered from back problems, deteriorated.

Poor medical care

The clinic administration failed to provide medicine for sick prisoners. Under pressure due to our frequent demands, sick prisoners were taken to the clinic, but they were not given appropriate treatment. Mostly they were given painkillers regardless of the source of their pain. The doctor would apologize to those who suffered from backaches saying he could not help them, as he did not have the necessary medical equipment.

The blankets they gave us also caused serious health problems, because they were saturated with dust from the desert. The prisoners would inhale the dust from the blankets through their noses and mouths while they slept. As a result, people developed chest problems, coughs, nasal infections, and eye irritations.

Continued Suffering

The overcrowding in the tents compounded our suffering. We could not move around freely in the tents, each of which was shared by 20 prisoners. There was not an inch of extra space, and only the luckiest amongst us managed to keep clothes in boxes hung from the top of the tents.

Rats made life a misery. They were permanent "guests" inside the tents. They spoiled everything including the food. Their favorite meal was the bread we received once every three days.

The severe heat compounded the physical and psychological pressures. Although the tents kept out the direct sunlight, they were not designed to decrease the effect of the sun's rays and the heat. The material out of which the tents were made created a greenhouse effect and exacerbated the situation. We asked for some blankets to block out the sun, but our demands were rejected. However, although the tents were hell during the daytime, we were forced to stay inside, as we had no other choice apart from sitting directly in the sun. We could hear one another's rasping breathing, especially at noon.

The tents were full of flies that were not like normal houseflies. They stung and bit us constantly, and their stings were very painful. We would spend a lot of our time trying to get rid of the flies, but this was useless without insecticide.

Food

The food was poor in quantity and quality. Each prisoner got three meals a day consisting of the following.

* Breakfast: Beans that lacked key ingredients such as olive oil and spices, one boiled egg and one glass of tea. (Many prisoners described the beans as "the concrete mixture")

* Lunch: Rice, soup, a piece of frozen burger or schnitzel

* Supper: Beans or vegetable salad plus a few olives

We ate only because we were imprisoned and had no other choice. The cooking pots were made of steel. They were very dirty, old and burnt. The dialogue committee¹² told us that they were left over from the previous Intifada. Each prisoner was also given a plastic cup that tainted the drinks with a terrible taste and smell, and a thin white plastic spoon. We often ate without using spoons as they broke easily. Every prisoner was also given a magash¹³ for his food.

Visits by lawyers and human rights organizations

Our only contact with the outside world came during visits made by lawyers and human rights organizations. Prisoners appreciated the role these lawyers and organizations played, despite the fact that the lawyers were forced to be selective in their visits. We were only allowed three minutes to meet with the lawyers, which was not enough time. The lawyers and prisoners could not hear each other well, as they were separated by a piece of glass with holes in it. All meetings took place with a soldier present.

Prisoners were disappointed by the ICRC. We had high hopes that the ICRC would provide books and newspapers. Following an agreement reached with the prison administration the prisoners asked the ICRC to provide us with newspapers. They agreed, but we received nothing. We also relied on the ICRC to help released prisoners reach their homes. When they were released all prisoners had to undertake a long journey on rough and dangerous roads from the Tarqoumya checkpoint near Hebron, which is where they were let go by the Israeli army, to their homes. The journey was particularly hazardous as all Palestinian cities were under curfew. There was a feeling that the ICRC did not provide enough help to released prisoners and that they failed to adequately protest about the prison administration, its policies and prison conditions. During my period of detention, the

ICRC visited us only three times. We also once asked the ICRC to help provide medical aid for sick prisoners. The person in charge apologized saying that this request was outside of the ICRC's mandate.

Below are some details of cases of prisoners who were sick and needed medical attention who I met in Ansar:

1. Khalil Hamdan, aged 30 from Nablus, married with two children: Hamdan suffered from asthma. He said that he had an inhaler that he used whenever he found it difficult to breathe. He used it almost every day, but it was at his house in Nablus. We asked the prison administration to provide an inhaler. They maintained that such issues were the responsibility of humanitarian organizations like the ICRC. Hamdan approached someone in the ICRC and asked for an inhaler, but his request was refused.

A few days later some prisoners woke up very early in the morning to pray. I could not sleep as the voice of the Muazen was loud and went for a walk in the yard. A prisoner called Naser told me that Hamdan was sick. I rushed over to him and found him lying on his mishtah. We asked the doctor to come. Hamdan was breathing in snorts and with difficulty, and his chest sounded very congested. His face was colored and his body was bathed in sweat. I talked to him, but he did not answer. I was scared for him. He was writhing and pressing his chest with both of his hands.

We carried him on his mishtah and put him out in the yard. We thought the open air might help. We fanned him with pieces of cardboard to help him breathe. He cried out and tore at his shirt in pain. His mouth and nose were full of mucus. We could not help and thought that we would lose him. We were really worried that he was having a heart attack. He suffered like this for about half an hour until a nurse came. Two of the prisoners carried him to the clinic. The next day we learned that he had been transferred to a hospital in the Negev. He stayed in hospital for one day and was then brought back to prison. His voice was weak and he was ill for several days. He had still not received an inhaler by the time I was released.

2. Ramzi Fayyad, from the Jenin refugee camp: Ramzi was injured after the Israeli army shot him in the thigh, fracturing the bone in his leg. Doctors had implanted pins into his thighbone and his leg was in a cast, so he could not walk or sit properly. He needed specialized medical care, but received none.

3. Basman Fahel, from the village of Kober Near Ramallah: Basman had severe back problems, which affected his legs. He managed to see a

doctor after frequent requests. The doctor did nothing for him. It turned out that he had a lumber compression. The doctor said that the clinic lacked the equipment to treat him properly, so he was given painkillers. When a member of staff from the ICRC visited us, Basman asked him for a walker, but he did not get it.

The prisoners had a discussion with one of the ICRC staff. They complained about the prison conditions. They also protested the fact that the Israeli forces were again using administrative detention, and the fact that they had reopened the Ansar 3 prison. They said that our detention in the prison was a threat to our lives, as the prison was located inside a military camp and was had inadequate facilities. They also added that the prison was not protected from insects. He ignored what they said replying, "Wasn't there a prison here before?"

Roll calls

Roll calls took place three times a day. During the roll calls prisoners were humiliated. They had to line up in rows of five. They were then told to sit on the ground regardless of its temperature or the weather conditions. We had to remain sitting until the officer finished reading out our numbers. It was absolutely forbidden to turn around or stand up during the counting process. Soldiers used to take up positions and point their guns at us. The counting was done deliberately slowly and it was very hot during the counting, especially at noon. The prisoners were very upset and angered by the soldiers' insults and the guns trained on them, making them rebellious.

Racist behavior

One of the prisoners was in charge of distributing food among the sections. On 24 June 2002 he was talking to another prisoner across the barbed wires when a soldier swore at him saying, "Shut up". The prisoners' representative asked him to stop swearing, but he took no notice and carried on insulting that prisoner and others saying "Fuck your mom". As a result the prisoners walked up to the barbed wire to protest his behavior. The soldier only stopped when his commander arrived and took him away.

Extension of detention period

Most of the prisoners were due to be released in the second half of June. Everyone waited impatiently for the date of his release, but when the time for release came, many prisoners were surprised to find out that their detention period had been extended based on decisions taken by the Israeli security services. They were really shocked. These decisions contributed to deterioration in the prisoners' moral. During May the prisoners announced a partial hunger strike to protest against the administrative detention policy and the conditions they had to endure.

Injures and suffocation

On 26 June 2002 the administration informed one of the prisoners in section 0D0 that they wanted him to give an affidavit in the Ofer prison. The prisoners could not agree to this, as they knew that he would be humiliated and harassed during his transfer. One prisoner had had his arm broken when soldiers assaulted him while transferring him from the Negev to Ofer. The prisoners insisted that they would not hand over this prisoner. They were told that they would be given 20 minutes to hand him over or else he would be taken by force. During these 20 minutes about 150 soldiers assembled, and took up positions surrounding the prisoners compounds. Snipers were placed opposite the section in which I was located. The soldiers were armed with heavy machine guns in addition to light weapons, shock grenades, clubs, and teargas.

In the meantime the prisoners were also preparing to defend themselves against the impending attack. They filled pots with water and soaked pieces of cloth to counteract the effects of teargas. No sooner had the twenty minutes expired than the soldiers attacked the section next to us. The sound of shock grenades rocked our section. Then we saw a cloud of smoke, a few seconds later our section was attacked. Teargas canisters and shock grenades fell on us from all directions. Our section was the easiest to attack, as it had no ceiling, unlike the other sections, which were like cages.

Prisoners clambered over each other to escape from the suffocating tear gas. None of us could breathe. Every now and then we removed the soaked cloths from our faces to check if anyone was injured, especially the elderly and the sick. Three prisoners, including myself, were hit and injured by shock grenades. I was injured on the leg and thigh; Amin Abu Raddahah was injured on the shoulder; and Muhammad Nagheyyeh was injured in the head.

Live ammunition was also used. We feared for the lives of the old and the sick, and took them out into the yard. We put them on the ground so that the soldiers could see the results of their actions. The attack lasted around 10-15 minutes. One of the shock grenades tore a tent cover.

Three prisoners suffered severe respiratory problems from the inhalation of teargas. They were Abu Husam from Ramallah, Abu We'am from Ramallah, and Abdel Jabbar from the village of Zawata near Nablus. Four other prisoners suffered from lesser respiratory problems. The three prisoners who were suffocating collapsed onto the ground and tried to vomit. They could not speak or breathe properly. At that moment a soldier threw another teargas canister. There were some nurses among the soldiers. We asked for their help. We could not do anything for the sick men except tear open their shirts, as none of us was trained in first aid. It was half an hour before the soldiers allowed these prisoners to be taken away. This was the first time in my life that I had seen a sick person being handcuffed despite the fact that he was almost unconscious. I also witnessed one patient who was unconscious and naked being taken to a doctor. He was thrown to the ground and dragged half of the way to the doctor and then held up in front of the doctor by his arms and legs.

An hour later the patients returned to the section and our fears subsided. We had been worried about them as they were old and sick. The smell of teargas remained in the section for two days. The prison administration punished us by depriving us of our allocation of cigarettes. They also cut off our water.

Catching rats and organizing our lives

Some of the prisoners came up with creative solutions to ease our conditions. At night rats had taken up permanent residence in the toilets. One of the prisoners made a trap to catch them, and managed to catch three mice, but we needed a bigger and stronger box to catch the large rats.

We made good use of the evenings; we read, talked, and exercised. Sometimes we met to drink a cup of coffee, a rare luxury in the prison. We made the coffee in a primitive way. Instead of kettles we used vegetable tins. We also used cardboard and moldy bread to make a fire. Some of the prisoners were experienced in making fires using butter and paper, but often there was no paper.

Extending detention periods

The last few days in prison were difficult. Most of the prisoners had their detention periods extended. Only a few of us were released on time. This meant that prisoners had to mentally prepare themselves for a new period of detention to avoid trauma.

I was due to be released on 1 July 2002. On the night before my release all of the prisoners were happy, as many others were supposed to be released on that day and no one had been informed that their detention would be extended. We had just started to enjoy a simple party for which we had prepared songs, drama and poetry. Everyone was in a very warm and friendly mood. However, half an hour later the soldiers snatched away our happiness when they informed some of the prisoners that their detention period had been extended. The singing stopped abruptly. Twelve out of the thirty prisoners who had been due to be released had their detention orders renewed. Everyone felt sympathy for those who had waited so impatiently for their freedom only to have it snatched away at the last moment.

The moment of release

The next day we got up early in the morning, but had to wait until 12:00 am to leave the section. A mixture of joy and sadness overwhelmed us. The release procedures lasted until about 4:00 pm. The prison authorities confiscated a notebook in which I had written some notes describing the prison, conditions, and my emotions. They took it under the pretext that the law prohibited prisoners from taking any written material out of prison. The same applied to letters that prisoners had written to their families and given to me to deliver.

Again, we were handcuffed and our legs were tied. Prisoners were tied to each other in pairs. Then we got into the bus for a final ride.

The bus took a round about route and drove for about three and a half hours. Finally it parked near the Tarqoumya checkpoint, which is located to the south of Hebron. We got off the bus, and in order to cross the checkpoint we had to show the soldiers a paper that stated that we had been imprisoned in Ansar 3. We then walked until a passing car gave us a lift for a short distance. We took another two vehicles to bypass roadblocks. We finally reached the al-ŌArroub refugee camp in Hebron at about 9:00 pm. A Palestinian family in the camp put us up for one night. The next day we continued our journey to Ramallah, which including long walks over difficult mountain roads. We finally reached Qalandya refugee camp outside Ramallah in the

afternoon. It was only then that we learned that Ramallah was under curfew, but we insisted on taking the risk of entering the city, moving from one house to another until we finally reached our homes.

Yaser al-Disi,

July, 2002

About the Author:

The following testimony was written by Mr. Yaser Al-Disi following his release from Israeli detention in July 2002. Mr. Al-Disi has worked with Al- Haq for two years as its media officer, and was arrested from Al-Haq's office during the March-April 2002 incursions of "Operation Defensive Shield". He completed his studies in journalism at Al-Najah University in Nablus, and has also studies in both Germany and Russia. Mr. Al-Disi is 28 years old, married and lives in Ramallah.

1 A few days after my arrest I realized what the soldier was talking about. It was an unexploded, but disarmed, missile that Israeli helicopters had launched at a Palestinian house in Hebron in 1988 during the previous Palestinian Intifada. Al- Haq had kept the missile as evidence of Israeli crimes committed against Palestinians in the occupied territories.

2 Hebrew word for pieces of wood put together to form a square shaped object used by prisoners to sleep on.

3 Hebrew word for a light thin pieces of sponge used to cover the Mishtahs

4 A special type of unleavened bread baked as thin wafers by Jews for the Passover feast.

5 A prisoner speaking Hebrew who is delegated by the other prisoners to liaise over their daily needs with the soldiers.

6 The Israeli occupation forces give all prisoners numbers when they enter the prison. These numbers are used instead of names.

7 . Arabic words that mean beans. They are used in this sentence because they rhyme with the other part of the sentence (the last two words)

8 . Israeli border police (Hebrew)

9 . A Palestinian human rights organization based in Ramallah that works to defend the rights of Palestinian prisoners.

7 . Arabic words that mean beans. They are used in this sentence because they rhyme with the other part of the sentence (the last two words)

8 . Israeli border police (Hebrew)

9 . A Palestinian human rights organization based in Ramallah that works to defend the rights of Palestinian prisoners.

10 . A desert in the south of historical Palestine

11 . These workers were Palestinian prisoners selected by other prisoners to prepare food, although, there was no real kitchen, but only a tent where food was prepared under very basic conditions using primitive utensils.

12 . A committee elected by the prisoners to negotiate with the prison administration on daily matters.

13 . Special plate for the food (Hebrew)