



HUMAN RIGHTS  
ישראל ישראלית (ISRAEL)

PHYSICIANS FOR  
רופאים אטבים  
לזכויות אדם לחقوق الإنسان

POSITION PAPER

# UNLAWFULLY DETAINED, TORTURED, AND STARVED:

THE PLIGHT OF GAZA'S  
MEDICAL WORKERS  
IN ISRAELI CUSTODY

FEBRUARY 2025

## Introduction

Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza in October 2023, the Israeli military has detained thousands of Palestinians, including physicians, nurses, paramedics, and other essential healthcare workers. Many were taken from their workplaces, such as hospitals and medical facilities, while others were arrested at their homes or while passing through military checkpoints set up across Gaza.

According to Healthcare Workers Watch<sup>1</sup>, the Israeli military had detained over 250 healthcare workers in Gaza by September 2024. This includes a broad spectrum of medical personnel and support staff, many of whom provide life-saving care amid the ongoing war. As of this report, over 180 remain in detention without a clear indication of when or if they will be released.

Healthcare workers detained in Gaza were subjected to enforced disappearance, leaving their whereabouts, conditions, and fates unknown,<sup>2</sup> while legal representatives were unable to locate or visit them. After more than 6 months of complete isolation, human rights organizations were finally able to locate and visit some of these detainees. Between July and December 2024, Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) lawyers visited over 24 medical workers from Gaza, primarily physicians, in both military and Israel Prison Service (IPS) detention facilities. This report is based on structured interviews conducted during those visits, providing critical insights into the ongoing detentions, the treatment of medical workers, the cruel conditions they endure<sup>3</sup>, and the legal violations associated with their incarceration.

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<sup>1</sup> [Unlawful Detention of Healthcare Workers by Israeli Occupation Forces in Palestine since October 7, 2023](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Forcible Disappearance of Gazan Detainees... A Continuing Crime Against Humanity | Addameer, Center for the Defence of the Individual - Six human rights organizations in High Court petition against secret and illegal detention of thousands of Palestinian permit-holders from Gaza, Center for the Defence of the Individual - High Court of Justice rejected HaMoked's petition to reveal the whereabouts of 62 Gazans incarcerated in Israel and thus again sanctioned protracted incommunicado detention](#)

<sup>3</sup> [B'Tselem report: "Welcome to Hell: The Israeli Prison System as Network of Torture Camps", August 2024](#)

The report analyzes the detention of medical personnel and the violations of their rights under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which grants medical workers – including physicians, nurses, and paramedics–special protections under the Geneva Conventions and other protocols due to their impartial and vital role in caring for the wounded.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, medical personnel testimonies indicate that their arrests were aimed mainly at gathering intelligence rather than investigating their involvement in armed conflict. This suggests a systemic policy that violates human rights<sup>5</sup> and, more broadly, indicates that such arrests are arbitrary and unlawful under international legal standards.

The testimonies also reveal how Israeli authorities treat Palestinian detainees, particularly medical workers. From the moment of the arrest in Gaza, through transportation, and later in Israeli detention facilities, detainees endure physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, as well as starvation and medical neglect amounting to torture.

Over 70 detainees have died in Israeli custody since October 2023.<sup>6</sup> Detained medical personnel learned of their colleagues' deaths while in detention, with some even witnessing the deaths of fellow detainees. Among those who were killed are at least four Palestinian medical workers from Gaza:<sup>7</sup> Dr. Adnan Al Bursh,<sup>8</sup> Dr. Iyad Al Rantisi,<sup>9</sup> Dr. Ziad Al-Dalou,<sup>10</sup> and paramedic Hamdan Abu Anaba.<sup>11</sup> With little to

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<sup>4</sup> Customary IHL – Rule 25. Medical Personnel

<sup>5</sup> While intelligence gathering itself does not constitute a breach of human rights, the manner in which it is carried out can constitute violations of internationally recognized human rights frameworks such as the ICCPR and CAT.

<sup>6</sup>Based on a Freedom of Information request filed by PHRI, as of July 2024, 44 Palestinian detainees have died in Israeli military custody, and as of September 2024, 21 detainees have died in IPS custody. At least six more have died in Israeli custody since this information was obtained. This is an unprecedented number of deaths in Israeli detention facilities in a single year. [جمعية نادي الأسير الفلسطيني - Detainees' organizations issue a report on the most significant information and data related to detainees in Israeli prisons during 2024](#)

<sup>7</sup> [UA ISR \(19.2024\), 27 Gaza Detainees Have Died in Custody at Israeli Military Facilities Since the Start of the War - Israel News - Haaretz.com](#)

<sup>8</sup> ['He was the light of my life and I lost him': How a famous surgeon died in an Israeli prison after being taken from Gaza hospital | World News | Sky News, New testimony claims to reveal the moments that led to death of Dr Adnan Al-Bursh | World News | Sky News](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Israel Arrested a Senior Doctor in Gaza. Six Days Later, He Died in a Shin Bet Interrogation Facility - Israel News - Haaretz.com](#)

<sup>10</sup> [UN expert shocked by death of another Palestinian doctor in Israeli detention | OHCHR](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Palestinian medic killed in Israeli prison: Gaza Health Ministry](#)

no information made available by Israeli authorities, their deaths have raised serious concerns about the treatment and conditions under which medical professionals are being held.

The violations documented in this report emphasize the responsibilities of states to uphold international legal standards during times of war. The report calls for the international community to hold Israeli authorities accountable for these abuses and demand the immediate release of all detained medical personnel.

## The Healthcare System in Gaza

Through its 57 years of military occupation and 17 years of blockade, Israel has persistently hindered the development of the healthcare system in Gaza. This has directly impacted health facilities and personnel, overwhelming an already fragile healthcare system with thousands of wounded individuals through several military offenses. With its most recent military assault, Israel has rendered Gaza's healthcare system helpless by deliberately and systematically targeting local medical facilities—including sieging and bombing hospitals and preventing the delivery of medical aid. This has led to the complete destruction of Gaza's healthcare system<sup>12</sup> and the deaths of over 500 medical personnel as of June 2024.<sup>13</sup> Israel justifies its assault on Gaza's hospitals by claiming they lost their protected status as they were being used as " Hamas command centers"<sup>14</sup>, though it has failed to provide independently verified evidence for these claims. This allegation was later challenged by independent investigations<sup>15</sup>. Israel has sought to back these efforts to undermine hospitals' protected status by detaining medical personnel—despite holding them arbitrarily without conviction or due legal process.

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<sup>12</sup> [Investigate Israel's assault on Gaza's Healthcare Infrastructure | Position Paper | רופאים לזכויות אדם](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Pattern of Israeli attacks on Gaza hospitals raises grave concerns - report | OHCHR](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Investigate Israel's assault on Gaza's Healthcare Infrastructure | Position Paper | רופאים לזכויות אדם](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Investigating the assault on al-Shifa, Gaza's largest hospital - The Washington Post, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights calls for independent investigation into Al-Shifa hospitals claims | CNN](#)

The widespread destruction in Gaza, compounded by the mass detention of medical workers, not only undermines the core principles of humanitarian law - which explicitly protect medical personnel and facilities from attack or interference - but also severely disrupts the provision of critical medical services during wartime, particularly amid Israel's unprecedented annihilatory assault on Gaza.

## The Practicalities of Unlawful Detention

### Arrest

*"I was arrested inside the hospital while the army besieged it for three days. On the day of my arrest, the army ordered the evacuation of the hospital. There was a battalion outside, and they forced us to strip in front of everyone and walk naked for about thirty meters. We were detained while still naked for about two hours, then transferred to rooms in houses, with thirty detainees in each room. We were handcuffed with plastic zip ties for five days and interrogated inside the houses. I was next to my medical colleagues when they took them, tortured and beat them, and later released some while arresting others." - Dr. Khaled Alser, surgeon at Nasser Hospital*

Of the 24 medical personnel visited by PHRI lawyers, 20 were arrested while carrying out their medical duties - directly violating several IHL provisions designed to protect the ability of medical workers to perform life-saving tasks without fear or interference. The remaining four were arrested either at their homes, while crossing checkpoints, or in displaced persons camps. All arrested medical personnel reported experiencing extreme violence, humiliation, and being stripped of their clothing, including on hospital grounds. They were kept handcuffed, blindfolded and detained for hours to days, both in Gaza and during transportation to Israeli detention facilities.

Describing such transport, Dr. Khaled Alser, a 32-year-old surgeon at Nasser hospital, stated: *"In the middle of the night, I was transferred from the second building along with two other [civilians]. The soldiers*

*handcuffed our hands behind our backs and shackled our legs too tightly. They threw the three of us into a military jeep and drove us around for over two hours. During the ride, they humiliated and beat us—sitting on us, kicking us with their boots, and striking us with their rifle barrels. We begged them to stop, but they continued.”* These patterns of abuse were evident in additional testimonies. Dr. A.M., a 42-year-old surgeon at Nasser hospital, testified: *“The soldiers poured cold water on us, kicked us, struck us with batons, punched us, and slammed my head against the bus railing.”*

Some reported that the violence intensified once the Israeli soldiers discovered they were physicians: *“While being transported to the interrogation facility, they threatened to cut off my fingers because I am a dentist.”* said Dr. K.J. Adding to this, Dr. K.S., a 29-year-old surgeon at Al-Shifaa Hospital stated: *“They took me from Al-Shifa Hospital directly to a detention center. Along the way, they beat us with batons one after another and especially the doctors. They asked each detainee whether they were a doctor.”*

These and additional testimonies indicate that Palestinian medical personnel were arrested in Gaza in violation of IHL. Their ability to provide crucial care for the wounded was not only hindered but entirely prevented, despite the prohibitions outlined in Article 24 of the First Geneva Convention, and Article 3 of both the Third and Fourth Geneva Conventions.<sup>16</sup> Evidence also shows they were subjected to degrading, cruel, and inhumane treatment during their arrest, with their profession making them even more heavily targeted. This systemic treatment, evident across all collected testimonies, could be seen as a form of extrajudicial punishment.<sup>17</sup> This constitutes a complete disregard for the duties and obligations regarding the treatment of protected groups under IHL, including those specified in Articles 12 and 15 of the First Additional Protocol of the Geneva Conventions, which guarantee humane treatment and prohibit abuse and extrajudicial punishment.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> First Geneva Convention, Article 24 “Protection of Permanent Personnel”, Third Geneva Convention & Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 3 “Conflicts not of an International Character”, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Third Geneva Convention & Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 3 “Conflicts not of an International Character”, 1(d).

<sup>18</sup> Additional Protocol I, Article 12 “Protection of Medical Units”, Article 15 “Protection of civilian medical and religious personnel”.

The Israeli military's arrest processes are fundamentally improper, particularly when targeting Palestinian medical personnel in Gaza, most of whom were arrested in hospitals. The patterns observed in these arrests raise grave concerns regarding their legality and suggest a systemic approach that violates not only IHL but also fundamental human rights.

## Interrogations

*"I was interrogated more than eight times... they repeated the same questions about Hamas, tunnels, and hostages. I told them I had no connection to Hamas and knew nothing about the tunnels... They forced me to draw a map of the hospital."- Dr. K.S., a surgeon at Al-Shifaa Hospital.*

Israeli authorities conducted interrogations both in Gaza and in detention facilities in Israel. Medical personnel were primarily questioned about the Israeli hostages, tunnels, hospital structures, and Hamas' activity. Some were even asked about fellow physicians. They were rarely asked questions linking them to any criminal activity, nor were they presented with substantive charges. Based on these testimonies, it appears the interrogations were mainly aimed at intelligence gathering rather than investigating alleged security offenses.

In Gaza, field interrogations involved forcing medical personnel to provide on-site information about hospital structures. Dr. Khaled Alser, who was taken back to Nasser hospital during a military raid, stated: *"The first time, I was taken to the hospital at night while the military raided it and forced to guide soldiers to the hospital's electric generator room. The second time, I was made to show them the wards on the ground floor of the surgical building. On the way, I was beaten and verbally abused."* In some cases, it appears that medical personnel were used as human shields during field interrogations. As Dr. K.S. described:

*"They ordered me to go to a school and bring the people out, using my status as a physician. I refused. Then, they asked me to go to a specific area wearing their military uniform and instruct them, but I refused again."<sup>19</sup>*

In addition to abuse during field interrogations, those conducted in Israeli detention facilities also frequently included physical, psychological, and sexual torture. Dr. K.J., a dentist arrested by the Israeli military from Al-Shifaa Hospital, where he and his family had taken shelter after being displaced, testified: *"The 'captain'<sup>20</sup> interrogated me about tunnels, terrorist operatives, and weapons. Every time I said I didn't know, he beat me, punched me, and kicked me in the testicles, along with frequent cursing. The interrogation lasted for about an hour."* Continuing this pattern of abuse during interrogations, a specific method known as the Disco Room<sup>21</sup> was repeatedly referenced across several testimonies. K.N., a 60-year-old emergency coordinator and ambulance driver, described his ordeal: *"In my first month of detention, I was interrogated for four or five days. During these sessions, they beat me, poured water on me, and humiliated me. I was interrogated in the "Disco Room" for a week, where the volume was always deafening. They beat me so badly during one session that my tooth filling fell out. They poured cold water on me, struck me on the head with a cell phone, and beat me half to death. They threatened to harm my family and parents."* Similarly, A.MQ., a 38-year-old nurse, testified: *"In Petah Tikva (during my interrogation), I was suspended by my wrists from the ceiling, my legs forced backward, and left in that position for hours."*

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<sup>19</sup> While the use of human shields was supposedly banned by the Israeli High Court in 2005 after the Second Intifada, there have been documented instances of its use by the Israeli military. See: "Mosquito Protocol" [Gaza: The Israeli military has used Palestinians as human shields, soldier and former detainees say | CNN](#), [How Israel's Army Uses Palestinians as Human Shields in Gaza - The New York Times](#), [Is Israel's army using Palestinians as human shields? - DW - 09/09/2024](#), [Israel/Occupied Territories: High court ban on army's use of "human shields" is a welcome development](#)

<sup>20</sup> A nickname given to Shin Bet interrogators.

<sup>21</sup> "Disco Room" is an interrogation room with extremely bright lights and deafeningly loud music playing at all times, along with other sensory overloading methods, used to mentally strain detainees in preparation for and during interrogation. See: [Gazans held in Israeli jails allege abuse : NPR and Eye on Palestine - A released Palestinian detainee recounted the experience in an interrogation room known as "The Disco" located in Ofer Prison. This room, measuring 3x3 meters, is infamous for its intense sensory manipulation techniques. : Eye on Palestine : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)



*They humiliated me and spat on me... During the interrogation in Ofer Prison, they extinguished cigarettes on my head and poured coffee over me. I was brutally beaten."*

The use of abuse or coercion to extract information during interrogations is strictly prohibited under IHL. Article 32 of the Fourth Geneva Convention explicitly bans the use of physical or psychological coercion against protected persons to obtain information.<sup>22</sup> This provision serves to safeguard detainees from torture and other cruel and inhumane treatment during detention. It also implicitly protects them from being forced into false confessions obtained through coercion. The testimonies we have obtained clearly indicate that Israeli authorities have employed both psychological and physical coercion during the interrogation of several medical personnel in Gaza, attempting to extract information through threats and violence.

## Legal Procedures

*"I had to sign a document in Hebrew. I had two court hearings-one in April, where I was informed there were no charges, only an extension of my detention. The second was a month ago, when they told me my detention would be extended until the end of the war." - Dr. A.S., cardiologist at Nasser Hospital.*

In arresting Palestinians in Gaza, including healthcare workers, Israeli authorities have invoked the 'Unlawful Combatants' Law - first applied to Lebanese nationals, who were used as bargaining chips in prisoner exchanges.<sup>23</sup> This classification deprives Palestinian detainees from Gaza of prisoner-of-war status, denies them access to legal counsel for extended periods after arrest, and delays their judicial hearings. As a result, crucial oversight of their arrest and detention conditions is severely restricted.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 32 " Prohibition of corporal punishment, torture, etc."

<sup>23</sup> Abdallah, S. L. *A History of Confinement in Palestine: The Prison Web*. The Sciences Po Series in International Relations and Political Economy. 2022, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> [Shut Down the Sde Teiman Facility Now](#) | 2024. [רופאים לזכויות אדם](#), p. 4

After months in detention, most medical personnel were never formally charged. Across all cases, they were denied their right to legal representation. As K.N. described: *"I've had two court hearings. Both times, they told me there were no charges against me. [I was told that] the government will release people like me when the war is over. My last hearing was over seven months ago."* Similarly, Dr. O.A., a 65-year-old gynecologist and labor physician, stated: *"I had two court hearings over the phone. They told me there were no charges against me but extended my detention indefinitely. I still don't have a lawyer."*

While some medical personnel were not charged at all, others were given charges without any evidence being presented against them, denying them the opportunity to challenge the decision, as is their right under IHL. As Dr. K.S. testified: *"They forced me to draw a map of the hospital. They also made me sign a testimony document written in Hebrew, even though all my interrogations were conducted in Arabic. I didn't have a lawyer with me. They asked me if I wanted one, and I told him I did. I was informed that my detention would be extended until further notice because I 'belong to a terrorist organization, according to confidential information.' I denied it."* Similarly, Dr. Khaled Alser testified: *"On the forty-fifth day of my detention, a person who claimed to be a judge told me I belonged to a terrorist organization and that I would be detained for an indefinite period. I told him I hadn't been offered any legal advice or protection to understand my legal standing. The 'judge' replied that the charges were related to my work as a physician in the hospital. He was wearing a shirt similar to those worn by the Shin Bet officers and was sitting in an office."* It is important to note that Dr. Khaled Alser was released in October 2024 after seven months in detention without being charged with any criminal offenses. He is one of few released medical personnel that PHRI was able to visit, which is why his full name is being used in his testimony.

This pattern of gathering intelligence while denying detained medical personnel access to evidence of their alleged crimes or to legal counsel is evident across many cases. Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) explicitly prohibits arbitrary arrest

and detention, requiring that individuals be promptly informed of the reasons for their arrest and any charges against them.<sup>25</sup> However, Israeli authorities have repeatedly failed to provide such information. Additionally, the invocation of "confidential evidence"- evidence that does not need to be disclosed to the defendant or their lawyer - constitutes a severe violation of the right to a fair trial, as it deprives the detainee of an opportunity to challenge the evidence against them. Although Article 9 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to challenge detention in court, the use of confidential evidence effectively undermines this right. Moreover, the absence of legal representation and the lack of credible, translated testimony in the detainee's native language - both of which are required under both IHL and domestic law - further exacerbate the denial of their legal rights and undermine the legality of their detention.<sup>26</sup>

## Cruel Treatment and Inhumane Conditions

### Abuse and Torture

*"After my intake at Nafha Prison, on the first day, the warden beat me and made me sit on the ground. He didn't stop beating me until someone told him, 'Stop, you've killed him'."- Dr. O.A., gynecologist and labor physician.*

Initially, most detainees from Gaza, including 23 of 24 interviewed detained medical personnel, were taken to the Sde Teiman military detention camp.<sup>27</sup> The severe conditions and widespread abuse of detainees at Sde Teiman have been extensively reported by international media and human rights organizations,<sup>28</sup> earning it the nickname "Israel's Guantanamo."<sup>29</sup> The accounts gathered in this report reveal a grim reality of relentless, severe, and cruel mistreatment, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Dr. M.T., a 33-year-old physician and head of surgery at the Indonesian Hospital, who was detained at

<sup>25</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 9.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> [Shut Down the Sde Teiman Facility Now | רופאים לזכויות אדם](#)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, [Israel: Palestinian Healthcare Workers Tortured | Human Rights Watch](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Sde Teiman: Israeli whistleblowers detail abuse of Palestinians in shadowy detention center | CNN](#), [Close Israel's 'Guantanamo Bay' - Haaretz Editorial - Haaretz.com](#)

Sde Teiman, testified: *"For three days, Force 100<sup>30</sup> soldiers raided the enclosures with dogs, beat prisoners, and allowed the dogs to urinate and defecate on us. Since my detention and up until a few days ago<sup>31</sup>, I was kept handcuffed and blindfolded. We were always handcuffed and blindfolded, forced to kneel or sit on our buttocks, which caused pressure sores. If someone got tired, they were forced to stand against the fence"* Dr. A.M. recounted the sexual assault endured by a fellow detainee: *"The soldiers kept taunting him, saying, "You're the one who was raped." He was deeply depressed. One day, they entered with dogs, assaulted him, and struck him on the head - he died immediately."*

The testimonies are further compounded by accounts of abuse that involved not only physical violence but also psychological torment. Dr. A.M. described his dehumanizing experience at Sde Teiman: *"They forced us to bark like dogs and mimic animal sounds."* Similarly, Dr. K.J. recalled: *"My hands and legs were restrained, and we were forced to play a "game" where we had to jump from place to place within five seconds. If we failed, the soldiers beat us. They threatened to kill me and cut off my hands."* In Ofer military camp, Dr. K.S. described psychological torture through sleep deprivation: *"The lights stay on all day and night, and the guards don't allow us to cover our faces while sleeping."* Beyond the abuses, Dr. M.T. recounted incidents of defacement of religious scriptures that occurred during his detention in Sde Teiman, constituting not only psychological abuse but also violating internationally recognized rights<sup>32</sup>: *"during one of the raids, the soldiers handed us Qurans and took pictures of us holding them. A female soldier then entered and stepped on the Qurans. After I reported the event to a Bedouin officer, they took me and beat me severely."*

While Sde Teiman has garnered significant attention, the conditions in other Israeli detention facilities are equally catastrophic,<sup>33</sup> with Israeli

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<sup>30</sup> A "counterterrorism" unit within the Israeli military. Members of this unit were arrested in late July 2024 for their involvement in the alleged gang rape of a Palestinian detainee at Sde Teiman. See: [Israeli Leaders Demand Probe of IDF Rape Video-To Find Out Who Leaked It | Common Dreams](#)

<sup>31</sup> Dr. M.T. was arrested in March 2024. A PHRI lawyer visited him in July 2024. This means that he spent at least four months continuously handcuffed and blindfolded.

<sup>32</sup> Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 27 "Treatment I. General observations".

<sup>33</sup> [Gazans reveal horrors of Ofer Camp](#)

human rights organization B'tselem even describing them as "a network of torture camps."<sup>34</sup> Though they receive less public scrutiny, these facilities continue to subject detainees, including medical personnel, to inhumane treatment, with little to no regard for their basic rights or well-being.<sup>35</sup> Dr. N.T., a 48-year-old surgeon at Nasser, was held in at least two military detention camps—Sde Teiman and Ofer – as well as Ktzi'ot, an IPS facility. His testimony exposes systemic abuse across all locations: *"At every stage, we endured beatings and severe violence—batons, dog attacks, and boiling water poured on us, causing severe burns."* Describing incidents of sexual assault, he added: *"I know that some prisoners had batons inserted into their buttocks."* Recalling his detention at Nafha Prison, another IPS facility, Dr. O.A. testified: *"As I was taken to my cell, they repeatedly beat me and slammed my head against the wall. My left eye turned blue, and my rib was fractured. Later, beatings occurred mainly during cell raids, depending on the guards' mood and how much they resent a particular cell."* Describing the targeting of medical personnel, Dr. R.M., a 51-year-old pediatrician at Muhammad Al-Durrah Children hospital held in Ktz'iot, testified: *"I face severe conditions simply because I am a pediatrician. When they realize someone is a doctor or an academic, the treatment becomes harsher."*

All testimonies gathered by PHRI indicate that the abuse occurs nearly daily. Article 2 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), which Israel ratified in 1991,<sup>36</sup> requires state authorities to take active measures to prevent acts of torture.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, Article 4 of the regulations of The Fourth Hague Convention mandates that all captured individuals must be treated humanely.<sup>38</sup> These actions also violate the Rome Statute<sup>39</sup> and could constitute war crimes. Article 8, Section 2(A)<sup>40</sup> of the statute defines torture

<sup>34</sup> B'Tselem report: "Welcome to Hell: The Israeli Prison System as Network of Torture Camps", August 2024

<sup>35</sup> [Starvation, Medical Neglect, Humiliation, and Violence as State Policy, עיצורים עזתים מעידים; מעשי ההתעללות במתקני המעצר הצבאיים לא נגמרים בשדה תימן - מגזין חדשות](#)

<sup>36</sup> [UNTC](#)

<sup>37</sup> Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), Article 2.

<sup>38</sup> The Fourth Hague Convention, Regulations: Article 4.

<sup>39</sup> Although Israel is not a State Party to the Rome Statute, the State of Palestine is a recognized member.

<sup>40</sup> The Rome Statute, Article 8, Section 2 (a), (ii).

and inhumane treatment as war crimes, while Section 2(B)<sup>41</sup> characterizes violations of personal dignity, particularly humiliating and degrading treatment, as war crimes as well. These practices, involving sustained mistreatment of individuals in state custody, not only contravene the principles of IHL but also meet the legal criteria for war crimes as outlined in the Rome Statute. The ongoing nature<sup>42</sup> of these abuses suggests that they are systematically perpetrated by Israeli authorities against detained Palestinians, including medical personnel from Gaza.

## Starvation

***"We are given three slices of bread with jam or chocolate barely enough for one slice. Most of the food consists of sugar. I started fasting to save food-I have been fasting for 22 days now."* – Physician (initials withheld for privacy)**

All 24 medical professionals interviewed by PHRI reported experiencing severe malnutrition, adding to the regularly emerging reports from Israeli military camps and IPS prisons.<sup>43</sup> The testimonies gathered from military camps such as Ofer Camp reveal that detainees are provided with an almost identical menu: four to six slices of bread with a small amount of sugary spread for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Occasionally, detainees are given a meal of processed meat, boiled potatoes, or boiled pasta once a week instead. According to the accounts, neither fruit nor vegetables are provided, except on rare occasions when they are given one or two vegetables to share. Testimonies gathered from IPS detention facilities reveal a similar menu, with the addition

<sup>41</sup> The Rome Statute, Article 8, Section 2 (b), (xxi)

<sup>42</sup> , האגודות הישראליות הגישו עתירה לבג"ץ למען האסירים הביטחוניים: "ענישה אכזרית" - אייס , [أطباء لحقوق الإنسان: عنف وإذلال من قبل سجانين بحق الأسرى الفلسطينيين](#), [Following the Abuse of Palestinian Prisoners by the Israeli Security Service, we Turned to International Authorities | רופאים לזכויות אדם | Center for the Defence of the Individual - Human rights organizations in an urgent High Court petition: Stop the violation of basic rights and minimal living conditions of Palestinian "security" prisoners](#)

<sup>43</sup> [End the Policy of Starving Security Prisoners | Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Israel Reduces Food for Palestinian Security Prisoners, Conceals Data, Sources Say - Israel News - Haaretz.com](#), [Israeli prisons cut Palestinians' food rations to <starvation levels>, Gazans reveal horrors of Ofer Camp, Starvation, Medical Neglect, Humiliation, and Violence as State Policy](#)

of rice, beans, and processed meat or chicken once a day. However, the testimonies highlight that the quality of these meals is poor, often unseasoned and undercooked. The quantity is also insufficient, leaving most detainees hungry by the end of the day. Some are forced to ration their meager food supply to cope with their hunger. As Dr. N.T. noted: *"The food lacks vitamins; there's no balanced diet. Our immune systems became weak."*

The limited diet is provided to all detainees, regardless of any preexisting health conditions. One physician, whose initials are withheld for privacy reasons, testified: *"I only eat uncooked food because of my diabetes."* due to the food provided primarily consisting of sugar. Furthermore, the inadequate quantity and quality of the meals have led to health issues among detainees who did not previously suffer from such conditions, with these issues left untreated. Dr. R.M., who already had a stomach ulcer prior to his arrest, testified: *"The food is scarce and lacks variety. [There is] no fruit, and just one very small type of vegetable."* He added, *"I also face bowel issues from the lack of food and because it is undercooked, which has contributed to my development of hernias."*

To address these concerns, PHRI consulted a clinical nutritionist, who reviewed the conditions—particularly at Ofer – and provided an expert assessment. The evaluation confirmed that the diet provided to detainees is severely inadequate, both in terms of caloric intake and essential nutrients. The meals lack protein, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals, and fail to meet the basic nutritional needs of fully grown adults. The nutritionist's opinion highlighted the alarming disparity between the detainees' diet and the recommended nutritional standards, raising significant concerns about the potential for serious and irreversible health damage. This inadequate diet can lead to a range of debilitating health problems, including chronic fatigue, unexplained weight loss, muscle atrophy, and a compromised immune system. It also hinders wound healing, contributes to the development of anemia, weakens bone health, and can result in long-term organ damage. These consequences are detrimental to the physical well-being of detainees and perpetuate a cycle of deteriorating health, as

the lack of proper nutrition leaves individuals increasingly vulnerable to further complications.<sup>44</sup>

This policy of starvation is a form of cruel treatment and serves as a tool of torture by Israeli authorities. At its core, it is a grave violation of the fundamental provisions of IHL concerning the treatment of detainees. Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention<sup>45</sup> explicitly mandates that detainees be held in conditions that uphold their human dignity, including ensuring access to sufficient and nutritious meals necessary for their health and well-being. By failing to ensure the nutrition of detainees, Israeli authorities are not only violating their obligation to treat detainees with humanity and dignity—they are also disregarding a core principle of IHL. The lack of adequate meals not only undermines the fundamental rights of detainees, but also exacerbates their vulnerability to irreversible health deterioration, further deepening the violations of their rights under both IHL and broader human rights frameworks.<sup>46</sup>

## Medical Neglect & Systemic Denial of Medical Care

*"I told the doctor: 'We are professional colleagues—you are meant to treat me humanely'. After hearing this, he slapped me while I was still blindfolded and told me: 'You are a terrorist'." - Dr. H.SB., Orthopedic physician at Nasser Hospital*

Compounding the previously outlined health complications caused by the severe abuse and extreme malnutrition in custody, the testimonies consistently emphasize a critical limitation - or complete absence-of medical care in Israeli detention facilities. Detained medical personnel with preexisting health conditions, as well as those whose health deteriorated while in custody, describe pervasive medical neglect. The testimonies reveal that the detention facilities fail to provide adequate medical care in multiple ways, including frequently denying timely and appropriate treatment and ignoring requests for medical attention. H.M., a 21-year-old nursing student at Al-Azhar University, testified:

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<sup>44</sup> This medical review was requested by PHRI in November 2024 and can be presented upon request.

<sup>45</sup> Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 76 "Treatment of detainees".

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



*"I suffered a dislocation of the neck muscles on the rib cage (CH+). I used to take three types of medications, but since my arrest, I haven't been given any medication, and no one has asked about my health. I ask for medication every day, but it's always in vain." Requests for medical care were not only denied but also punished; Dr. K.S. testified: "Our cell was infested with scabies for two months, maybe even longer. After repeatedly requesting treatment, they pepper-sprayed us and moved me to a different cell in another ward."*

Additionally, the lack of essential medical resources and sanitation exacerbates the already dire conditions. Dr. M.S., a 27-year-old general practitioner at Al-Aqsa Hospital, testified: *"There is a widespread scabies infection among all prisoners in the ward. No one is treating these infections or any other health conditions."* Similarly, Dr. M.M., a 27-year-old physician who volunteered at Al-Shifaa, said: *"There's no underwear"<sup>47</sup>, and the scabies is killing us. No medical treatment or even basic pain relief is provided, and we haven't seen a doctor."*

While most testimonies reveal a complete absence of medical care, some accounts reveal inconsistent access to essential medications, particularly for detainees with chronic illnesses. As described by Dr. N.T.: *"Before my arrest, I had high blood pressure and had undergone catheterization and an angiogram. I was taking three types of medication for it. At Sde Teiman, I didn't receive any medical treatment. At Ofer military camp, they gave me medication, but then it stopped. Then, a doctor examined me because I was experiencing chest pain. I had endured severe beating on the way there, and no medical treatment was provided. When I arrived at Ktzi'ot, I saw a doctor and was prescribed [a certain medicine], but it caused complications and headaches. I reported it multiple times, but they dismissed it and simply said, "It is what it is."*

The testimonies also highlight a significant lack of medical monitoring, which is crucial for detainees facing health conditions—particularly those with chronic illnesses. Dr. M.K., a 46-year-old orthopedic specialist at Al-Shifaa Hospital, who suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure and was regularly medicated prior to his arrest, stated: *"There is a doctor, but*

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<sup>47</sup> Testimonies from Palestinian detainees from Gaza reveal that they were given only one pair of underwear, which they were forced to reuse without the ability to wash them.

*we never see him. There are detainees with illnesses, yet no doctor examines them. There is a clinic, but detainees aren't seen there. I have not seen a doctor or nurse. No one has inquired about my medical condition.*" Dr. M.K.'s lawyer visit occurred four months after his detention.

The detained medical personnel, drawing from their professional experience, provided a unique perspective on the medical neglect they witnessed. Dr. M.H., a 36-year-old ICU physician at Nasser Hospital, testified: *"The medical neglect is terrifying. Nearly all the prisoners currently have or have previously had scabies. Many suffer from diabetes and high blood pressure, and some suffer from severe bacterial infections."* Adding further insight, Dr. M.K., an orthopedic specialist at Al-Shifaa, remarked: *"As an orthopedic surgeon who found himself in a military prison, everything that happens here is unreasonable and illegal. I witnessed cases of prisoners who had limbs amputated at Sde Teiman camp."* Unable to tolerate the extent of medical neglect, some have tried to communicate their concerns to physicians within the detention facilities, seeking to appeal to them as fellow professionals. Dr. H.SB., a 30-year-old orthopedic surgeon in Nasser hospital, testified: *"I told the doctor: 'We are professional colleagues - you are meant to treat me humanely'. After hearing this, he slapped me while I was still blindfolded and told me: 'You are a terrorist'."* Faced with refusal and, at times, even violent, dehumanizing aggression, some have taken it upon themselves to tend to untreated health conditions. Dr. N.T., head of surgery at Nasser Hospital, testified: *"Sometimes I conduct surgeries on other prisoners; I clean the abscess and open it with a piece of plastic, then disinfect it with bleach."* An examination of how the Israeli military and IPS facilities address health needs exposes serious violations in the provision of medical care. Articles 76, 91, of 92 of the Fourth Geneva Convention<sup>48</sup> require that detainees receive medical treatment based on their health needs, with follow-up examinations to monitor their overall health and prevent deterioration. Moreover, current conditions pertaining to medical care in Israeli detention facilities directly violate Israel's own "Unlawful Combatants" law, which

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<sup>48</sup> Fourth Geneva Convention, Article 76 "Treatment of detainees", Article 91 "Medical Attention", Article 92 "Medical Inspection".

guarantees detainees the right to medical care<sup>49</sup>. The systematic failure to meet these standards reflects a deliberate disregard for the ethical obligations governing healthcare in detention settings<sup>50</sup>.

The denial of necessary medical treatment often results in serious harm and places detainees in life-threatening conditions. The available testimonies suggest that Israeli authorities, as the custodial bodies, are deliberately defying their responsibilities toward detainees and are using the denial of medical care as a form of torture. The complicity of physicians in detention facilities in systemically denying medical treatment to detainees betrays the core principles of their profession, compounding the ethical violations at play.<sup>51</sup> The failure to uphold these principles not only worsens the physical and psychological harm inflicted on detainees but also risks causing irreversible damage, with some detainees already having died in Israeli custody.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

The mass detention of Palestinians, including medical personnel critical to the provision of care during times of war directly violates the fundamental principles of protection established in IHL. Their arrests are deemed unlawful, as it appears they are being held without charges or facing proper legal procedures, seemingly for the sole purpose of gathering intelligence or potential leverage in future hostage exchanges. This renders their detention even more egregious under both international law and fundamental human rights principles.

Furthermore, their continued detention in dire conditions constitutes an ongoing violation of their basic rights. These individuals are subjected to degrading and harmful treatment, including abuse, starvation, and the denial of medical care, all of which amount to systematic torture. The gathered testimonies expose the severity

<sup>49</sup> Incarceration of Unlawful Combatants Law, 5762-2002, "Conditions of Incarceration", 10(a).

<sup>50</sup> [Shut Down the Sde Teiman Facility Now | רופאים לזכויות אדם](#)

<sup>51</sup> [Rights groups petition court to shutter Negev detention facility over torture claims | The Times of Israel, Starvation, Medical Neglect, Humiliation, and Violence as State Policy](#)

<sup>52</sup> [עציר מינהלי מת לאחר שלא קיבל טיפול למחלתו, על גופת אסיר ביטחוני נמצאו חבלות - מדיני ביטחוני](#), See footnotes 4, 5,6,7,8,9.

and widespread and systematic nature of the mistreatment, revealing consistent and deliberate actions by the occupying power.

Despite widespread reporting by international bodies,<sup>53</sup> the inhumane conditions and abuse continue without consequences. By disregarding the extensive evidence from human rights organizations<sup>54</sup> submitted to Israeli courts and authorities, and allowing abuse and torture to persist, the state creates an environment of impunity where these acts are normalized, further exacerbating human rights violations. The lack of accountability for perpetrators further underscores the systemic nature of the issue, with victims facing ongoing violations and no legal recourse. This deliberate disregard for ensuring humane treatment and legal protections—as mandated by both national and international law—along with the severe lack of oversight, demonstrates Israeli authorities' unwillingness to end the abuses and confirms their complicity in these unlawful acts.

The patterns emerging from the testimonies of medical personnel arrested in Gaza and detained by both the military and the IPS, alongside hundreds of other testimonies gathered by PHRI over the past year<sup>55</sup>, point to a deeply ingrained policy. This policy governs not only the nature of the arrests but also the conditions of detention, which appear to be arbitrary, punitive and constitute extrajudicial punishment. The persistence of these practices, despite repeated calls for change and the clear international legal framework designed to protect medical workers, reflects a systemic policy that is abusive, intentional, and subjects those in Israeli custody to life-threatening conditions—requiring urgent intervention.

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<sup>53</sup> [Israel: Palestinian Healthcare Workers Tortured | Human Rights Watch, UA ISR \(19.2024\)](#)

<sup>54</sup> [Update on the Conditions and Torture Violations Committed Against Gazan Detainees | Addameer, Shut Down the Sde Teiman Facility Now | רופאים לזכויות אדם | Systematic Violation of Human Rights: The Incarceration Conditions of Palestinians in Israel Since October 7 | Report | רופאים לזכויות אדם | Systemic torture and inhumane treatment of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prison facilities since October 7, 2023 – stoptorture, Israel: Palestinian Healthcare Workers Tortured | Human Rights Watch, Center for the Defence of the Individual - Human rights organizations in an urgent High Court petition: Stop the violation of basic rights and minimal living conditions of Palestinian "security" prisoners, Repeal the Ban on Red Cross Visits to Palestinian Prisoners | Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Systematic Violation of Human Rights :The Incarceration Conditions of Palestinians in Israel Since October | 7 Report | רופאים לזכויות אדם |](#)

As the situation continues to develop, the legal and ethical responsibility to protect those in custody cannot be overstated, and the consistent failure to meet these obligations calls for urgent scrutiny. The international community must hold Israeli authorities accountable to safeguard the rights-and lives-of all detainees, while ensuring that violations of IHL are promptly addressed.

It is urgent that the international community demands the immediate release of all detained medical personnel and guarantees that the fundamental rights and protections of medical workers are upheld.

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