

Human Rights: Condemning Palestinians to Torture and Children to Imprisonment

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A boy soldier returns home to assuage the “righteous indignation” of Israel, no longer “sensitive [even] to its image of democracy.” Palestinian soldiers and civilians of no blame, who were incarcerated and held in Israeli prisons for resisting the brutal occupation of their land, return to find themselves in another prison, Gaza, while others were forced into exile. All of the Palestinians released face an uncertain future. The future remains even more bleak for the Palestinian children left behind Israel’s prison walls, however.

Does Israel really care for its returned son Sergeant Shalit? Or was he used as a political pawn? Was “partial intelligence” soon after his capture enough to effect a rescue operation? Evidence suggests it was, but what of Gaza and the conditions inside Israel’s notorious prisons? The world must seek the testimonies of the returned sons and daughters of Palestine and learn of and from their ordeal.

The late Rachel Corrie said of Gaza in January 2003, “I couldn’t even believe that a place like this existed.” 147 square miles ?packed? with human suffering only matched by human stoicism and dignity. Over 1.5 million people, two thirds of which are refugees, toil in an open prison that is created and sustained by Israel through the pernicious and unconscionable use of “de-development;” the “deliberate, systematic and progressive dismemberment of an indigenous economy by a dominant one, where economic -and by extension, societal- potential is not only distorted but denied.” This is done to encourage a Semitic exodus. For those Semites that would leave: a denial of return, and ?residence rights.? For those that would stay: a life of subsistence under an illegal blockade and the revealing by successive Israeli administrations of the worst aspects of the human condition, hate, leading to the inevitable expression of the evils of Apartheid.

General Karen Konig AbuZayd, warned Gaza “is on the threshold of becoming the first territory to be internationally reduced to a state of abject destitution.” Perhaps Israel will kill more children before then? Kathleen and the late Bill Christison wrote “Against a total of 13 Israeli civilians killed by rocket attacks from Gaza in the three and one-half years between mid 2004 and the end of 2007, the number of Palestinians killed in a much shorter period - from the beginning of 2006, when Hamas was elected and Israel began to concentrate its force on Gaza, through September 2008 ? was over 1,400, the vast majority in Gaza. This is a kill ratio of more than 100 Palestinians to every one Israeli. Approximately 20 percent of the Palestinians killed were children.” We know that Israel is “good at killing” and good “at going wild.” They are good at this because the government is lacking in any morality. Is it a surprise then that Palestinian Israeli Knesset Member Haneen Zoabi said “Israel has a general atmosphere of a fascist state.”

The children of Gaza ask their parents in their trauma “when are we going to be killed”? What then of the children languishing in Israeli prisons? How does this fit with David Cameron’s statement of 2009, during a Conservative Friends of Israel annual lunch, where he praised Israel because it “strives to protect innocent life.” On the release of Gilad Shilat (2011), he said “I can only imagine the heartache of the last 5 years, and I am full of admiration for the courage and fortitude which Sergeant Shalit and his family have shown through his long cruel and unjustified captivity.”

What about the “the long cruel and unjustified captivity” of the Palestinian children, where according to the United Nations Human Rights Council, ‘administrative’ detention is regularly used against Palestinian children. Their rights denied and they are thrown into “seriously bad prison conditions including over-crowding, family visits denied, arbitrary transfers, torture and ill-treatment by Israeli security soldiers and prison guards, deteriorating health conditions and increasing deaths in custody.”

The above was corroborated by the abhorrent findings of The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) that “accused Israel of torturing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners by shackling them in violation of international standards.” According to the Israeli Human Rights Organisation B’Tselem, as of October 2002, “85% of Palestinian detainees [had] been tortured during interrogation”. Most arrests are arbitrary and a methodology of terror. Article 9.1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states “Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.”

What happens in the notorious Facility 1391, which is an hour’s drive from Tel Aviv? It is Israel’s “Guantanamo Bay,” where Palestinians detained have consistently been denied access to The Red Cross and other international organisations? What happens there in violation of ‘International Standards’? And, why has Israel, according to The Guardian, “airbrushed from Israel, aerial photographs [of Facility 1391] and purged [it] from modern maps.” It was kept secret until 2003.

Facility 1391 is situated in a “Tegart fort on route 574 between Kibbutz Barkai and Kibbutz Ma’anit in northern Israel. Human rights lawyer, Manual Hazzan concluded that it “exists to make torture possible – a particular kind of torture that creates progressive states of dread, dependency, debility.” Does not this “dread, dependency, debility” permeate the citizens of Gaza? And, is this not wicked? Between 2001 and 2006, “600 complaints of alleged ill-treatment or torture were brought, but none had been followed up.” One detainee, Hassan Rawajbeh, who during four months of detention only saw his persecutors said, “you begin to feel like the jail exists only for you, that no one else is there.”

As far back as 1968, The International Committee of The Red Cross reported that in one prison “A detainee was subjected to suspension by the hands. Burns with cigarette stubs. Blows by rods to the genitals. Tying up and blindfolding for days. Bites by dogs. Electric shocks at the temples, the mouth, the chest, and testicles.” What would The International Committee of The Red Cross find in Facility 1391 today?

Formed in 1987 and headed by the former Supreme Court Judge Justice Moshe Landau, the Landau Commission “found that the GSS [General Security Service] interrogators routinely used force during interrogation of prisoners, and then committed perjury at subsequent

trials.” It was therefore of supreme importance that, in 1994, the UN Committee Against Torture stated “The Landau Commission report, permitting as it does ‘moderate physical pressure’ as a lawful mode of interrogation, is completely unacceptable to this committee.” In the use of ‘physical pressure’ and reportedly worse, Israel contravenes the UN Convention Against Torture Article 1.1 which defines Torture as “Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, [which] is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person, information or a confession”, reinforcing the view that Israel does practice Apartheid.

The International Convention for The Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (1973) holds that “by inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them” constitutes Apartheid. Moreover, “the practice of Apartheid is an international crime.”

Torture, as Israel and the mute international community knows, is absolutely prohibited and that prohibition is “accepted as a principle of customary international law.” As Noam Chomsky points out in ‘Propaganda and the Public Mind’ “For years, Palestinian prisoners claimed that their confessions had been obtained under torture. The courts, all the way up to the High Court, uniformly rejected this charge. They just dismissed it as false.”

So when “the [Israeli] Attorney General’s complete abstention from ordering the opening of criminal investigations against the GSS interrogators suspected of torture and/or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment [enabling] the absolute lack of oversight of the happenings within GSS interrogation rooms ? All of this creates an unconditional defence for GSS interrogators.” What hope then for oversight and justice for the Palestinian prisoners of war when “unconditional defence” is for the indefensible, the continued and systematic abuse of Palestinians to include children?

These men, women and children will not be “airbrushed” from our collective conscience or history. It also makes clear that ‘Universal Jurisdiction’ must be upheld and those leaders, aware of the abuse indeed are then complicit in it, must be brought before the International Court of Justice.

The world needs to know that shockingly even civil matters have and had been “dealt with by Israeli military courts.” For decades now as soon as a child reaches the age of 16 and was accused, he was brought before the ‘kangaroo courts’ of the Israeli military in “flagrant violation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.” Ignoring then international laws and conventions, these unprotected innocents were at the mercy of the brutal occupier and that is no mercy at all.

According to the organisation Global Geopolitics and Political Economy “Israel is the only state worldwide that has child prisoners under the age 18 years.” Friends of Humanity International reports that “Israel uses all sorts of punishment and tortures against child prisoners to recruit them as spies. They threaten them with rape and other forms of violence.” Further, “The Israeli State and prison service facility has escalated their humiliating and torture tactics. Barely a week passes before another raid or attack against prison chambers.”

Needless to say the psychological tension in expectation of the next brutal assault induces into the minds of prisoners an unbearable pain. Of course this is the intention of the Israeli

authorities, and, makes this statement by Moshe Etzioni 'one of the high court justices' intolerable. According to Chomsky and during an interview with Amnesty International Etzioni was asked, "Why the Israelis were getting such a high confession." Everybody knows what that means. He said, "Arabs tend to confess. It's part of their nature."

It is a fact that on the 27 September 2011, "OC Central Command signed Amendment 10 to the order regarding Security Provisions." The amendment changing "provisions relating to minors in the military-justice system, raising the age of minority from 16 to 18." Still minors, mostly accused of stone throwing have, according to B'Tselem, their rights breached "at all stages of the process: arrest, interrogation, trial, and imprisonment." Shame on Israel. Shame on David Cameron. And shame on America and the international community, for their continued silence and therefore continuing complicity.

Great Britain might be a High Contracting Party to the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is today acting as a low, slithering retracting party to the "white wash of lies" issuing from Israel's propaganda machine. Do we not recognise the nature of the present and past administrations of Israel from the litany above? And if we do, must we not speak out on every hand and at every opportunity? As Kathleen and Bill Christison warn in their book 'Palestine In Pieces' "The United States and the rest of the international community, by winking at Israel's aggressively expansionist policies, have given Israel virtually total impunity to do whatever it likes with Palestinian land and lives," and indeed its children.

Oh Israel you would do well to hearken to these words from one of your own. "If a child asks bread of you, would you offer a stone? If your child asked for fish to eat, would you offer a snake? Would you give a scorpion to the little one who asked for an egg?" And would you offer prison, torture and exile to the children that 'cry freedom'?

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