

Palestine: Testimony of 12-year-old beaten and imprisoned with adults

Tsahal allows the torture of children

By [Global Research](#)

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As painful as this story is, it is nothing out of the ordinary for Israeli soldiers acting with total impunity, with a colluding “justice” system that condones and allows torture and an overwhelming majority of Israeli-Jews defending such crimes under the pretence of “security” or looking the other way in nauseating apathy.

For those in the so-called Israeli “left” (“liberal” Zionists, “post” Zionists, and all other shapes and forms of Zionists — read racists) who still argue that most Israelis simply do not know and need to be educated about the occupation and its daily crimes to be won over, reports like the one below should serve as a cold shower. Those soldiers/criminals are not mercenaries coming from distant lands, nor do they hail from fringe, fanatic groups in Israeli society. They ARE Israel.

Being a largely people’s army — still — where every Jewish Israeli is required to serve (excluding the ultra-orthodox), the Israeli army consists of soldiers who quite accurately represent the Israeli mainstream, the academy, the business sector, the rich and poor families, the Ashkenazis, Mizrahis, Ethiopians, Russians and other backgrounds. They are widely respected by society and enjoy many benefits and privileges for serving, duly, in the occupation army. As was said by many, Israel is still very much an army with a state that revolves around it.

With every defeat at the hands of the sophisticated and amazingly trained and disciplined Hizbullah resistance, those frustrated, young, dehumanizing/dehumanized Israeli soldiers, who act as if they suffer from entrenched inferiority complexes or clinical paranoia, take their anger out against those they perceive as lesser humans, *relative* humans, or sub humans: Palestinian children, students, academics, professionals, pregnant women, people with physical challenges, the elderly, poor peasants, needy day-laborers, and other sectors of Palestinian society under occupation.

Israelis who despite all this still do not know are those who really *do not want to know*. That is a moral — actually, an immoral — decision, not a fault due to lack of information.

If boycotting apartheid-colonial Israel is not terribly called for now, then when?

Omar Barghouti

10th November 2008.

Testimony: 12-year-old beaten and imprisoned with adults



Muhammad Khawajah at his family's grocery store in Ni'lin
(Photo: Iyad Hadad, B'Tselem, 18 Oct. 2008)

I live with my family in Ni'lin. We live on the ground floor of the house, my two uncles and their families live on the first floor, and my grandmother lives on the second floor.

Last Thursday [11 September], around 3:00 A.M., I woke up from my mother's shouts. She was shouting, "*Get up! Get up! The army is here!*" My father wasn't home that night. I got up and went out with her to the inner courtyard of the house. There were about 12 soldiers there, and their faces were painted black. One soldier wore a black hat that covered his face. He sat on the stairs outside the house and didn't take part. I think he was a collaborator who led them to houses.

The soldiers were on the first floor. I heard them tell my Uncle Sami to direct them to our floor. One of the soldiers asked, "*Where is Muhammad?*", and I realized he was asking about me. The soldier told my uncle to call me, so he did. I started walking towards them. Two soldiers grabbed me and took me outside. I realized they wanted to arrest me. I was afraid, and began to cry, and called my uncle to come with me.

The soldiers cuffed my hands tight with plastic handcuffs, which hurt a lot. A soldier grabbed me by the shirt from behind and started walking and pushing me forward. The shirt was up against my neck and I couldn't breathe properly. I tried to free myself, and he punched me in the back and pulled the shirt tighter, choking me even more. Another soldier also punched me and pulled my hair as we walked. I cried and called out for my uncle and my father. The soldiers hit me and said, "*Quiet! Quiet!*" They led me to an alleyway between the houses, where there are cactuses. We were walking by some cactuses and then one of the soldiers pushed me into them. The thorns pricked me in the hands and legs. The soldiers kept on pushing me forward and hitting me along the way.

While we were walking, children from the village began to throw stones at the soldiers. It felt like it was raining stones. The soldiers were confused. Some of them ran off, and the others pushed me to move faster, and I fell down. One soldier started dragging me along the ground, on my stomach, with my hands tied. The ground was full of stones, gravel, and dirt. He pulled me by my hands and I cried and shouted. He told me to shut up. He wanted to pull

me faster, to get away from the stones. He dragged me a few meters, until we were behind a wall. It felt like my right knee and the palms of my hands were injured. My knee was bleeding.

Some soldiers fired tear gas in the direction of the stone throwers. The grenade fell not far from me and I started coughing and crying. My eyes were burning. We started walking again, the soldiers pushing me from behind. We got to a house in the village, about 400 meters away, and they broke in. It was the house of 'Abd a-Rahman Lu'ai 'Abd al-Halim, 14, who goes to school with me. They arrested him and his cousin, Sufian Nawaf al-Khawajah, 18. They took the three of us to the village center, about 400 meters from my house, and made us stand facing a shop with our hands raised. 'Abd a-Rahman and Sufian were handcuffed as well. The soldiers beat us and knocked us to the ground. We lay there and they stepped on us, on our heads and stomach, for a few minutes. Then they stood us on our feet and pushed us toward the entrance to the village. A soldier was behind each of us, holding each one by the shirt.

Every now and then the soldiers punched and kicked us. One soldier was angry at me in particular. He beat and strangled me, as if he wanted to kill me. I think some of the soldiers had been hit by the stones thrown by the children. I shouted and cried, I was so scared. It was still dark out. They led us about one kilometer, to the junction that leads to the Nili settlement. There were lots of army jeeps at the junction. The soldiers blindfolded me and put me into a jeep. It was about an hour after they had arrested me. The jeep began to move. I didn't know where it was going.

I sat on the floor of the jeep, without any soldiers next to me. After about half an hour, maybe an hour, of driving, the jeep stopped, and the soldiers took me out of it. I could see a bit through the blindfold. I didn't know where I was, but it was an army base. I saw another two jeeps pull up. They took 'Abd a-Rahman out of one and Sufian out of the other. Then they drove us somewhere else. There they sat us down on benches, and after ten minutes they called us in for questioning, one after the other. 'Abd a-Rahman went first and his questioning lasted for about twenty minutes. Then I went into the room and they took off my blindfold. I saw a man in civilian clothes. He was stout, with a round face and fair skin. He was wearing a skullcap. He said his name was Captain Sasson, and I also heard other people call him that. He sat me down next to his table and asked me questions about children from the village. He showed me pictures from a thick photo album, which had about 200 photos. He asked me about some children again and again, and I told him I didn't know them. Then he stopped asking me about them and showed me three pictures of myself, holding a slingshot in a demonstration against the separation fence. I admitted that it was me, but I kept on saying that I didn't know the other children. Then he hit me in the back with a plastic stool. I cried and shouted, and he hit me twice in the leg with a wooden stick.

A soldier who had a pistol on his hip ordered me to get up and face the window or the closet. There was a camera fixed in place in front of me. He took my picture, and then the interrogator told me to sign, with my fingerprint, a page with Hebrew writing. I don't know what it said. The soldier didn't read it to me. I assume it was a confession. I had to sign, because I was afraid he would beat me. The interrogator took prints of all my fingers, and then told the soldier to blindfold me again. He took me out of the room and sat me down on the bench outside. The interrogation had taken about half an hour. Then they took Sufian in, also for about half an hour.

Then they put the three of us in a big patrol van, and after driving for about quarter of an hour, they took us out and removed the blindfolds. I saw a sign that said "Ofer," and I realized we were in Ofer Prison. They took us into a room where they search people. They took off our clothes and a doctor examined us. They gave us bags with pants, a shirt, and flip-flops. They arrested Sufian and put him in a detention room. A policeman in a blue uniform [of the regular police] spoke with the soldiers. I understood that he was telling them to release us. He said to us, in Arabic, "*You are small children and should be released.*"

They kept 'Abd a-Rahman and me outside the detention room and then returned us to the van. Our hands were still cuffed. After about twenty minutes, they brought each one of us a container of jello. They removed the cuffs and let us eat. About half an hour later, they put the cuffs back on.

Two soldiers were guarding us in the van. We weren't allowed to talk to each other. Whenever we said something, a soldier told us to shut up. It was very hot in the van, and we were sweating a lot. They didn't give us anything to eat or drink. They did let us go to the bathroom, removing the handcuffs and putting them back on when we returned.

We stayed like that until after the muezzin called worshipers to evening prayers, around 8:00 P.M. Then they took us to another camp. I think it was the Beit Sira camp. At the camp, they gave us a chocolate drink and put us in a small room with green army mattresses. There weren't any beds. The cuffs were loose now, so we took them off, drank the chocolate drink and went to sleep.

The next morning, at 10:00, they put us in a patrol van and cuffed our hands again, but this time they didn't blindfold us. They took us back to Ofer Prison and put us in the tent section, Department 2, which had eighty-three detainees, of all ages. Each department had four tents, with about twenty detainees in each.

The detainees treated us well. They gave us candy, chocolate and potato chips. I felt comfortable. I fasted during the day and played soccer and tennis. The Department had TVs, one in each tent. I saw kids' programs during the day and a Syrian show, "Bab al-Hara", at night. A detainee helped me ask for the doctor to treat my leg. They took me to the clinic and the doctor put iodine on my knee wound and bandaged it.

At first, I was afraid and cried sometimes, because my family was far away. I've never been detained before. It was a new experience for me. I didn't know anything about detention before then. I don't know why they detained me - the whole village and all the children took part in the demonstrations, so why did they pick me?! The adult detainees took care of me because I was the youngest detainee in the Department, and they decided to make me assistant to the sergeant of the Department.

I would wake up every morning at 6:00 and call to the detainees: "*Let's go! Time for the count!*" They would get up and then the soldiers would come in and count them. I stood next to the soldiers as they counted. The soldiers treated me with respect and asked the older detainees to take care of me. The Department sergeant always helped me. He was older than most of the other detainees and spoke Hebrew. We worked together, helping the detainees and submitting their requests to the prison officials and to the guards.

On Sunday morning [14 September], at 6:00, I was taken to court together with 'Abd a-Rahman. Before we left for court, they shackled our hands and legs with handcuffs and iron

chains. When we got there, they put us in a small room to wait until the hearing began, at 2:00 P.M. We didn't ask for food or drink because we were fasting.

When the time for the hearing came, they took us into the courtroom, the two of us handcuffed. My father was there and so was a man from B'Tselem. Later, I learned that his name was Iyad Hadad. Other people also came to the hearing, and it made me feel good to see them. I was very happy to see my father, but the soldiers didn't let me hug him or even touch his hand.

An Israeli lawyer defended me. I don't know her name. She asked that I be released on bond and the judge granted the request, but set bond at 3,000 shekels. My father didn't have the money, so we couldn't pay.

After the hearing, they took me back into detention. The next day, my father managed to borrow the money for the bond, and I was released on condition that I return to a hearing on Tuesday [16 September]. I went home to my parents and family. I was very happy. I went to the medical clinic in the village because my neck and shoulder hurt, and also because of the scratches and wound to my knee. They examined me and treated me. They told me to rest for a week and to come back for follow-up.

My father went with me to the hearing on Tuesday. The hearing was postponed until 21 October 2008.

Since I got released, I've had problems. I wake up at night in fear and I can hardly sleep. I went to a psychologist called Khaled Shahawan and he gave me medicine and sedatives. I feel that it's hard to concentrate in school. Last year my grade average was 94.

Muhammad Salah Muhammad Khawajah, 12, is a student and a resident of Ni'lin in Ramallah District. His testimony was given to Iyad Hadad on 18 September 2008 at the witness's home.

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