

# Palestinian Hunger Strikers Near Death

## OPEN LETTER

By [Felicity Arbuthnot](#)

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## OPEN LETTER

The Rt. Hon. Alistair Burt, M.P., Under Secretary of State,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office,  
King Charles Street,  
London SW1A 2AH.

Dear Mr Burt,

Re: Mahmoud al Sarsak.

As Minister with responsibility for the Middle East and North Africa, the plight of Palestinians both held without trial, legal representation and on hunger strike in Israeli jails, is surely of deep concern to you.

According to the New York based National Lawyers Guild, the whole basis of administrative detention: “ ... is practiced by Israel in an unlawful way.” They quote Human Rights Watch which states: “The idea that you can lock up hundreds of people at any given time and over the years hundreds and thousands without any due process rights, really turns human rights law on its head.” (Executive Director, Heidi Boghosian, letter to Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, 21st May 2012.)

One such victim is Mahmoud al Sarsak (25) a Palestinian professional footballer, who has been held for nearly three years without trial. He is on the eighty first day of his hunger strike of desperation, as I write.

Bobby Sands, whose death – under the last Conservative government – with others, will ever scar Britain’s reputation across the globe, died on the sixty sixth day of his ultimate sacrifice for justice.

As a former Officer of Conservative Friends of Israel, who as recently as April addressed CFI’s Annual Delegates Reception, ahead of their welcoming luncheon for the new Israeli Ambassador, Daniel Taub, with Foreign Secretary William Hague – a Conservative Friend of Israel since the age of sixteen – you are exceptionally placed diplomatically to talk to the Ambassador and relevant others regarding this tragic and illegal state of affairs.

The UK government has suffered the approbation and fall-out from a parallel situation, thus is on a level playing field – or jail yard – so to speak.

Further, as both a passionate foot ball supporter and having led a political cross Party campaign for rights and freedom for Gilad Shalit, few could be better placed to speak for others incarcerated without rights.

Mahmoud Sarsak was arrested on 22nd July 2009, traveling from Gaza to the West Bank for a Palestinian National Team match. He is one of four thousand four hundred arbitrarily detained prisoners held in "appalling conditions." His weight has dropped from sixty five kg to forty kg.

Yesterday, Physicians for Human Rights (Israel) were finally allowed to send a doctor in to assess him. Their Report expresses extreme fear for his life, as that of fellow hunger striker Akram al Rekhawi, who has refused food for fifty six days.

Mr al Sarsak's family have not been allowed to see him since his arrest and he cannot telephone them.

There are also twenty seven Palestinian Parliamentarians and two Ministers being held.

You will be aware of the Parliamentary Early Day Motion of 9th May 2012, sponsored by Jeremy Corbyn. MP., regarding Administrative Detention in Palestine, which has been signed by MPs of all Parties. It quotes the distinguished international law expert and UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Richard Falk, who has: "... called on the international community to act to ensure that Israel complies with international human rights law, which it is currently violating with impunity ..."

Time is truly running out for those on hunger strike, there is literally not a moment to waste. Silence is complicity. For the British government to remain silent and bring no pressure to bear, effectively makes it party to a death penalty and the flouting of a swathe of international law including many Articles of the Geneva Convention.

Britain of course bears deep responsibility for the terrible plight of Palestinians in their increasingly diminished land, in their displacement, and destruction of homes, history and livelihood.

Foreign Minister William Hague's historical predecessor, James Balfour however (2nd November 1917) was specific on one thing: "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine ..." (my emphasis.)

Every right of the non-Jewish community has been ignored, abused, bombed, violated for sixty four years, with impunity and to silence from Israel's creator, Britain.

Please, Minister, do not compound these unique historic wrongs by remaining silent, as young men prepare to die of despair. No better envoy for justice than a diplomat and a Friend of Israel.

Saving a life could be just a telephone call away.

Yours sincerely,

Felicity Arbuthnot. (Dr. Hon., Phil.)

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