

Tackling the severe escalation in Israel's torture of Palestinians

UN experts and Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights organisations have documented a surge in torture and other abuse against Palestinians in Israeli custody in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel. Torture of Palestinians, including children, in Israeli custody was common long before 7 October but now appears to be the norm.

Four Israel-based NGOs including Adalah have made a [submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture](#) documenting a “severe escalation” in the abuse of detained Palestinians and of actions needed to end it. Addameer, based in the occupied West Bank, reported on 11 deaths in custody in just four months. Israel subsequently reported the [deaths of 27 Palestinians in its military facilities](#).

Since 7 October there has been an increasingly permissive environment for torture on account of:

- dehumanising language from Israeli leaders including by Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, who oversees the Israeli Prison Service, who said “*We need to remember that our prison guards are dealing with the scum of the earth, murderers, who pose a security threat*”.
- a surge in the use of harsh detention policies (notably administrative detention and Amendment No.4 to the Illegal Combatants Act) whereby detainees can be held without charge or access to a lawyer for more than six months.
- no access to ICRC visits and extremely limited access to medical care and lawyers.
- chronic impunity for perpetrators.

An [UNRWA report](#) (based on interviews with some of some 4,000 people detained by Israeli forces in Gaza) says: “Methods of ill-treatment reported included physical beatings, forced stress positions for extended periods of time, threats of harm to detainees and their families, attacks by dogs, insults to personal dignity and humiliation such as being made to act like animals or getting urinated on, use of loud music and noises, deprivation of water, food, sleep and toilets, denial of the right to practice their religion and prolonged use of tightly locked handcuffs causing open wounds and friction injuries...[A] detainee reported being made to sit on an electrical probe, causing burns to his anus, the scars for which could still be seen weeks later. He indicated that another detainee had suffered the same treatment and died as a result of his infected wounds.”

[UN experts](#) have condemned Israel’s “arbitrary detention and abuse of hundreds of Palestinian women and girls, and reports of many of them being severely beaten, subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, denied menstruation pads, food and medicine...[of] Palestinian women detained in Gaza kept in a cage in the rain and cold..[and of] multiple forms of sexual assault...of at least two female Palestinian detainees raped...[of others] threatened with rape and sexual violence.”

[Amnesty International](#) says: “Testimonies and video evidence point to numerous incidents of torture and other ill-treatment by Israeli forces including severe beatings and deliberate humiliation of Palestinians who are detained in dire conditions.”

[Save the Children](#) states: “There’s no justification for beating and stripping children, dehumanising and terrorising them. The abuse of Palestinian children in [Israeli] military detention was a child protection crisis [before](#) 7 October, and it has only become worse.”

What should the UK do?

The UK government and influential bodies and individuals should:

- publicly condemn the well-documented reports of torture and ill-treatment and demand that it ends immediately
- demand that detainees have unfettered access to lawyers, the ICRC, UN human rights monitors, medical care and regular family visits
- demand independent investigations into reports of torture and accountability for perpetrators
- demand that Israel immediately halts the military arrest, detention, and prosecution of children across the occupied Palestinian territory
- condemn dehumanising statements about Palestinians by Israeli officials

As a close political, economic and military ally of Israel, the UK government can also take concrete action to promote human rights of Palestinians under occupation including by:

- requesting details on clear steps that Israel is taking to end the torture and ill-treatment of detained Palestinians, including children
- suspending the UK-Israel trade agreement which is based on respect for human rights
- sanctioning named Israeli officials who make dehumanising statements and/or authorise or condone the torture of Palestinians
- banning investment from the UK into businesses working in the settlements
- providing clear material and diplomatic support for the International Court of Justice as well as the International Criminal Court with regards suspected serious violations of international law within the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel.



This briefing was prepared by War on Want and the Council for Arab-British Understanding (Caabu) in the context of parliamentary and public meetings with the human rights organisations [Adalah](#) and [Addameer](#).