

Israel-Palestine war: Israeli army 'arbitrarily' detains Palestinian women and girls from Gaza

Monday 11 December 2023, by [MASARWA Lubna](#), [OSMAN Nadda](#), [SHALASH Fayha](#) (Date first published: 11 December 2023).

The Israeli army has arbitrarily detained dozens of women and girls from Gaza without disclosing their whereabouts or the charges they face, Palestinian groups and families have said.

Contents

- [Detained, beaten, threatened](#)
- [Forbidden from speaking to \(...\)](#)

Photo: Families fear for women detained by soldiers and taken to undisclosed locations. Women with children sit in a trailer, as Palestinians flee their houses due to Israeli strikes, after a temporary truce between Hamas and Israel expired, in the eastern part of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip, December 1, 2023 (Reuters)

Since Israel launched a [ground invasion of Gaza](#) in late October, its forces have detained hundreds of civilians from their homes or while fleeing on a road declared by the army as part of a "safe corridor".

Some have been released after interrogation but many have been taken to undisclosed locations, including mothers who were separated from their babies and detained.

The Palestinian Authority's Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs on Sunday confirmed at least 142 females - including senior women and infants - are currently held in Israeli jails.

In a joint statement with the [Palestinian Prisoners' Club](#), the commission warned that "horrific crimes" have been carried out against the female prisoners.

It added that they were detained while forcibly fleeing along with tens of thousands of Palestinians from the northern Gaza Strip to the south through the Salah al-Din road.

The women were stopped at a checkpoint set up by the military on the road and taken to several prisons inside Israel, including Damon prison and Hasharon prison.

'Now her young children don't have anyone with them, they are just young infants'

- *Inshirah al-Shaikh, cousin of detained woman*

Inshirah al-Shaikh, a relative of one of the detained women, told Middle East Eye that her cousin, 19-year-old Aseel, was being held in the Damon prison.

"Aseel was with her mother, her wounded brother and two younger siblings," Shaikh explained.

"When she was stopped, she thought it was due to an issue with her documents and that she would be questioned, but she didn't come back and there's no news about her."

Shaikh added that some of the women who were detained were travelling south with their children but without their husbands.

"One woman was going towards Khan Younis when she was detained. Now her young children don't have anyone with them, they are just young infants," she said.

Another woman, who was employed by the United Nations Development Programme, was detained and taken to an undisclosed location.

"I still don't know where she was taken to until now. It is not even clear if she has been taken to prison or not," Shaikh told MEE.

Detained, beaten, threatened with rape

Suhair Barghouti, 65, a Palestinian freed from prison last month, told MEE she saw at least 10 female detainees arrive from the Gaza Strip ahead of her release.

The Israeli prison administration informed prisoners that they were forbidden from talking to those arriving from Gaza or approaching their section, Barghouti said.

"We were able to see them through a small slit in the section door. They were handcuffed and wearing uniforms belonging to the prison administration. The jailers were treating them harshly and pushing them forcefully into their new section," she recalled.

The female prisoners didn't know anything about the women from Gaza and were not allowed to go out even into the prison courtyard, but Barghouti said that she was going to shower in the outdoor bathroom and peeked into their room.

"I carried with me extra clothes that belonged to female prisoners who had been released in the [prisoner swap] deal. I pretended to go to take a shower, and when the prison guard was away, I looked out the small window in the door and called to the female Gazan prisoners in a whisper. I gave them the clothes and asked them about their arrest," Barghouti added.

According to Barghouti, some of the detained women were separated from their children by soldiers and forced to leave them behind despite their young age.

One of the women saw a 13-year-old boy crossing the street and told him to take her children with him before she was taken away.

Barghouti also said the detainees faced brutal treatment, including beatings, threats of rape, removal of clothes and hijabs, insults and deprivation of food.

"One of them told me in pain that the soldiers let police dogs loose on them to maul their bodies. The arrest was in a so-called safe passage that was not safe at all," she added.

Forbidden from speaking to lawyers

According to Amani al-Sarahna, the spokesperson for the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, the women have been forbidden to speak to lawyers, family members or other prisoners.

"The lawyers are forbidden from visiting them, but according to the testimonies we have received, Israel is carrying out horrific and atrocious crimes against detainees from Gaza," al-Sarahna told MEE.

Middle East Eye contacted the Israeli Prisoner Authority for comment. They replied that MEE should "speak to those who detained them" without providing further details.

An Israeli military spokesperson has not responded to a request for comment by the time of publication.

The PA's commission and the Prisoners' Club said they feared for the fate of the detained women in light of the information blackout imposed by Israeli authorities.

"In light of the shocking and horrifying images and testimonies that have emerged from citizens recently arrested in Gaza, the level of fear over their fate is increasing day by day," the group said in a statement.

"We do not rule out the possibility of Israeli forces carrying out field executions of the detainees from Gaza," they added.

Last week, Israeli forces [stripped dozens of civilian Palestinian men](#) of their clothes before detaining them from their homes in northern Gaza.

An eyewitness said at least seven men were fatally shot by troops for not complying with the soldiers' orders fast enough, according to the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor.

Lubna Masarwa in Jerusalem and **Fayha Shalash** in Ramallah and **Nadda Osman** in London

P.S.

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