

Immediate Action Needed to Ensure Independent International Oversight in Israeli Prisons and Detention Centers

Ramallah/Gaza, 2 May 2024 — Addameer, Al Mezan, Al-Haq, and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) express deep dismay at the news of the killing of 50-year-old orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Adnan Al-Bursh, while he was being held in Israeli custody.

Dr. Al-Bursh was the Head of Orthopedics at Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza. He also served as the Head of the Medical Department at the Palestinian Football Association and as a member of the Board Committee at the Palestinian Medical Council. Through his work, he has saved countless limbs of Palestinian patients injured during repeated Israeli assaults on Gaza and during the Great March of Return.

As reported by the [Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners' Club](#), Dr. Al-Bursh was abducted in December 2023 from Al-Awda Hospital in Jabaliya by Israeli forces during their ground invasion of Gaza. According to the Palestinian Authority's General Authority of Civil Affairs, Dr. Al-Bursh was killed on 19 April 2024, but the news of his death was only officially announced today. **Our organizations can confirm that he was killed while being held in Ofer Prison, an Israeli detention facility in the occupied West Bank operated by the Israeli Prison Services (IPS). His body remains withheld by Israeli authorities.**

Earlier in the morning of 2 May 2024, Israeli authorities returned over 60 released Palestinian prisoners and detainees to Gaza via the Karem Abu Salem crossing. Some of them displayed [visible signs of physical torture](#) inflicted upon them by Israeli authorities. In addition, the dead body of 33-year-old prisoner Ismail Abdelbari Khader was also returned to Gaza. Dr. Marwan Al-Hems, the Director of the Abu Youssef Al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah, [said](#): "When examining the body, torture marks were found on his wrists, as well as swelling in shoulders, knees and chest. The prisoner died inside the prison under torture. We do not know if he had a [blood] clot. But it is clear that he died inside prison."

Israeli authorities held Palestinian residents of Gaza separately from other Palestinian prisoners and detainees. Many are being held in *ad hoc*, army-administered detention camps, primarily situated in the Naqab desert in southern Israel. Testimonies from released prisoners indicate that the torture inflicted on Gaza detainees has reached unprecedented levels. During their abduction and detention, Palestinian residents of Gaza are treated as '[human animals](#)', demonstrating that the dehumanizing and genocidal rhetoric used by the highest levels of the Israeli leadership to characterize Palestinians was embraced throughout all ranks within the military and the IPS.

According to our preliminary documentation, Ismail's body is the first body of a Palestinian prisoner or detainee who "died" while in Israeli custody to be returned to Gaza. Between 7 October 2023 and 22 April 2024, there have been [16 documented deaths](#) of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons as a result of medical negligence or escalated torture practices against them. Among them, two were residents of Gaza: Majed Zaqoul, a 32-year-old worker detained in Ofer Prison and a second individual whose identity remains undisclosed as Israeli authorities refuse to provide any information.

Our organizations maintain that the actual number of Palestinians who have "died" while in Israeli custody is much higher than the documented cases suggest. This assertion is grounded in the dozens of testimonies from released prisoners collected by our organizations and other civil society organizations. These testimonies include [accounts](#) from tortured detainees who witnessed other fellow detainees being beaten to death. Indeed, since 7 October 2023, not only have Israeli authorities denied access to lawyers and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegates to visit Palestinian detainees, but they have also refused to provide accurate and timely information on thousands of Gaza detainees, including their whereabouts, as well as on Palestinian detainees who have "died" while in their custody.

The international community must exert pressure on Israel to ensure full transparency regarding the treatment of Palestinian detainees, including providing regular and accurate updates on their health conditions and general conditions, as well as the whereabouts and fate of hundreds of Palestinian residents of Gaza subjected to enforced disappearance. Pressure must also be exerted for Israeli authorities to engage in open and meaningful communication with lawyers, human rights and civil society organizations working to protect and guarantee the rights and dignity of Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

We also urge the international community to take immediate and concrete action to ensure international investigative mechanisms—including the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel—are granted unfettered access to Israeli prisons and detention centers. These bodies must be empowered to conduct thorough investigations into the alleged atrocities perpetrated by Israeli authorities against Palestinian prisoners and detainees, such as the killing of Dr. Al-Bursh. Without such access, accountability and justice for Palestinian victims remain elusive.

In addition to investigating reported crimes, it is essential to establish an independent, international presence of human rights observers to monitor detention conditions thoroughly.

This necessity arises from the alarming reports of limited access for lawyers and ICRC delegates, particularly concerning Gaza detainees. The lack of access raises grave concerns about the treatment and well-being of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, particularly given the dozens of testimonies collected by our organizations reporting serious instances of torture, cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment. Without any oversight, there is a heightened risk of human rights violations going unchecked, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and impunity.

Therefore, it is imperative that international investigative and monitoring mechanisms are granted immediate access to Israeli detention centers to ensure accountability, protect Palestinian detainees' and prisoners' rights, and prevent further violations from occurring.