

Palestinian Human Rights Defenders Under Attack

Palestinian grassroots activists and human rights defenders have long been subject to various forms of repression by the Israeli occupation including: administrative detention and political imprisonment; the use of tear gas, sound canisters, and live fire against mass demonstrations; closure of grassroots human rights organizations protesting the occupation and raids and arrest campaigns against organizations mobilizing the Palestinian public against the occupation. But Palestinian human rights defenders, particularly those involved in campaigns of mass popular struggle against the Israeli annexation wall, have recently been targeted at an escalating rate for political imprisonment – including prominent, internationally-known spokespeople and leaders like Jamal Juma', Mohammad Othman, and Abdallah Abu Rahmah.

The Anti-Wall Prisoners

In recent months, the Palestinian grassroots movement against the Israeli annexation or "Apartheid Wall," has come under specific and severe attack. The wall, which in 2004 was condemned as illegal under international law in an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, cuts through Palestinian land, annexing some of it to Israel and dividing Palestinian villages from crucial farmland. In the villages where popular mobilizations against the wall have been most visible through grassroots mass protests, including Nil'in, Bil'in, Jayyous, Budrus and Ma'asara, Israeli repression has been severe – from the seizure of over 100 peaceful demonstrators at various times, including children under 18, to the targeting of local Popular Committee leaders for questioning and administrative detention, to the use of live fire and "non-lethal" weaponry including tear gas that have caused injuries for over 1,100 Palestinian anti-Wall demonstrators. As a statement by the Bil'in Popular Committee Against the Wall said, these human rights defenders "are being targeted because they mobilize Palestinians to resist non-violently. Israel is stealing our land from us and then prosecuting us as criminals because we struggle non-violently for justice."

Israel has recently stepped up this repression by increased targeting of internationally-known leading Palestinian human rights defenders as well as residents of Palestinian villages opposing the Wall.



JAMAL JUMA'

Jamal Juma', the coordinator of the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign, who has widely spoken and written internationally about the effects of the wall on Palestinian life, was seized on December 15; he has been held under a secret file and has been denied permission to speak with his attorney or his family. He has been charged with nothing. According to the Stop the Wall Campaign that Juma' heads, "Jamal, 47 years old, was born in Jerusalem and has dedicated his life to the defense of Palestinian human rights. The main focus of his work is on empowering local communities to defend their human rights in the face of violations brought about by the occupation. ... He is widely respected for his work and has been invited to address numerous civil society and UN conferences. "Juma's is the latest and highest profile seizure within an ongoing campaign.

ABDALLAH ABU RAHMAH

On December 10, 2009, **Abdallah Abu Rahmah**, a schoolteacher and coordinator of the Bil'in Popular Committee, was seized by Israeli soldiers during a dawn raid. His West Bank agricultural village, known for its weekly protests against the Israeli apartheid wall, has become a symbol for the Palestinian popular resistance to Israel's ongoing military occupation. After two weeks of detention without charge, Abu Rahmah was charged with arms possession – for his public display of spent tear gas canisters and sound bombs, the "non-lethal" weapons shot at anti-Wall peaceful protesters by Israeli occupation soldiers.

MOHAMMAD OTHMAN



Mohammad Othman, a youth leader and member of the Stop the Wall Campaign, and another internationally-known human rights defender, was seized on September 22, 2009 when returning to his home in Palestine from an advocacy tour in Norway, raising international awareness about the Wall. In fact, prior to Jamal Juma's own seizure, he had been actively involved in supporting the campaign to free Othman, who remains in administrative detention without charge.



Palestine and Political Imprisonment

Political imprisonment is a fact of life for many Palestinians. In the West Bank and Gaza, 40% of Palestinian men have been imprisoned or detained in Israeli jails at some point in their lives - 8383 Palestinians are currently held in prison under Israel's occupation military court system. Indeed, it is difficult to find a family in occupied Palestine whose life has remained untouched by political imprisonment; nearly everyone has a father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, uncle or cousin who has had a significant experience with the military courts and prisons.

Since Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, a series of military orders and military regulations have governed Palestinians under occupation. These orders, issued by the Israeli military commander over the occupied Palestinian territories, provide the basis for the Israeli military courts that pass judgment on Palestinians and sentence them to long periods in prisons where, according to a recent Amnesty International report, many Palestinian prisoners "face medical negligence, routine beatings, position torture and strip searches by Israeli prison authorities." Nearly every facet of Palestinian life is governed by these military orders - military orders, it must be noted, that are not applied to Israeli settlers in the West Bank, who are subject instead to Israeli civil law.

The Israeli military detention structure includes a procedure known as "administrative detention," dating back to 1945 and the British occupation of Palestine, and renewed in 1988 as Israeli Military Order 1226, allowing military commanders to detain Palestinians for up to six months on the basis of "public security," without trial or charge. These six-month detentions are renewable indefinitely; some administrative detainees have been held with neither charge nor trial for years, facing only secret evidence reviewed by neither the detainee nor his or her lawyers.

The rights of human rights defenders

The protection of human rights defenders is an individual and collective right and responsibility, as recognized by the United Nations and enshrined in such key international covenants as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The rights of human rights defenders include the right to seek the protection of human rights at national and international levels; to conduct human rights education individually and with others; to form associations and non-governmental organizations; to meet and assemble peacefully; to seek, obtain, receive and hold information relating to human rights; to develop and discuss new human rights ideas and principles and to advocate their acceptance; to submit to governmental bodies and agencies and organizations concerned with public affairs criticism and proposals for improving their functioning and to draw attention to any aspect of their work that may impede the realization of human rights; to make complaints about official policies and acts relating to human rights and to have such complaints reviewed; to offer and provide professionally qualified legal assistance or other advice and assistance in defense of human rights; to unhindered access to and communication with non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations **and to effective protection under national law in reacting against or opposing, through peaceful means, acts or omissions attributable to the State that result in violations of human rights.**

States have the responsibility to protect these rights, as well as to affirmatively implement human rights. In the case of Israel, not only is it maintaining an illegal military occupation, it is building an illegal Wall, and attempting to imprison those human rights defenders who are campaigning internationally and through grassroots protest against that Wall and to secure Palestinian human rights.

What can we do?

Protecting human rights defenders from state repression is everyone's responsibility. The United States provides over \$3 billion in economic and military aid to Israel annually. **Contact your representatives and members of Congress** to urge them to inquire officially about the cases of Jamal Juma', Abdallah Abu Rahmah, and Mohammad Othman, and to raise all cases of Palestinian human rights defenders seized when reviewing U.S. aid to Israel, and encourage those members of Congress to penalize states who violate human rights and imprison human rights defenders - as well as maintain illegal occupation - by cutting off U.S. military and financial aid.

Call, write and protest outside your nearest Israeli consulate or embassy (<http://www.embassiesabroad.com/embassies-of/Israel>), calling for the release of the Anti-Wall prisoners, and all Palestinian political prisoners, and an immediate end to the persecution of Palestinian human rights defenders.

Support the courageous struggle for which these human rights defenders face persecution. Learn more about the popular Palestinian campaign to stop the wall and free Palestinian political prisoners at www.stopthewall.org and www.addameer.info.

