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Let The People Decide

[Center For Constitutional Rights Forum On Israeli Detentions](#)By Fran Korotzer - November 23, 2009 | [News](#)

Lamis Deek

(Photo: Bud Korotzer / NLN)

NEW YORK — On November 12, at the Center for Constitutional Rights in N.Y.C., people gathered to hear a talk by Ala ‘Jaradat, former Palestinian political prisoner and activist, on tour for the Palestinian organization, Addameer. The subject was something most Americans know nothing about, prisons in Israel and the “administrative detentions” of thousands of West Bank Palestinians. Attorney, Lamis Deek, introduced the subject and the participants. She began by quoting David Ben Gurion’s statement about the Palestinians, “The old will die and the young will forget”, and said that for the Palestinian people the slogan, “Existence is Resistance”, is very true. On order to understand the story of Palestinian political prisoners we have to start with a look at Zionism. From the beginning, the idea was for a land with only Jews. Zionist militias ethnically cleansed the area, expelling and murdering as they expanded and annexed as much land as they could. The areas cleared of Palestinians were occupied by soldiers, settlers were brought in, and the soldiers stayed. The imprisonment of their land eventually led to the imprisonment of the people. The very identity and existence of the Palestinian people was criminalized. When Obama took office people thought that, because of his relationships with Palestinians in Chicago, things would be better. Instead things got

worse.



Ala 'Jaradat

(Photo: Bud Korotzer / NLN)

Ala ' Jaradat explained that since 1967 the West Bank has been under military occupation. Administrative detainees are arrested by the Israeli occupying forces on the basis of Military Order 1591, which empowers military commanders to detain an individual for up to 6 months if they have “reasonable grounds to presume that the security of the area or public security require the detention”. The military usually comes to arrest the person in the middle of the night. The prisoner need not be charged and may never know why he is there or for how long he will be held. On or just before the expiration date, the detention order is frequently renewed. Arrest and detention are a way to legalize an illegal occupation. Laws are created to criminalize all aspects of life. They affect what you read, associations, business, and how you live. There are 1,660 military orders.

An IDF military commander governs the area. He assigns tribunals, translators, judges, and police. They all report to him and follow his orders. 800,000 Palestinians have been arrested and detained. 30% to 40% of the population have been in prison. Between 3 and 4 out of 5 Palestinian men have been in prison. There is hardly a household that has not had a member in prison. Any member of the Israeli military (IDF) can make an arrest and hold the person for 8 days. Then the detainee will come before a military tribunal where he can be held for another 80 days for interrogation. During this period there is an effort to convince the prisoners to become informants (collaborators). The prisoner may not see a lawyer for 90 days and his family will not be

notified as to him being held or where he is being held. It is at this time, also, that torture is most likely to take place. A report by the Israeli human rights center, B' Tselem, stated that 85% of the prisoners Israel interrogated each year were subjected to some form of torture, and that torture was practiced as routine policy. Women and children are not exempt. From January 2008 to June 2009 there were an average of 9 children in detention every month. On May 15, 2009, the UN Committee Against Torture expressed "concern regarding numerous, ongoing, and consistent allegations of the use of torture and ill treatment taking place before, during, and after interrogations" by Israel. If a detainee makes a statement under torture it is immediately acted upon. No further evidence is required – there will be a prosecution by a military tribunal.

With 1,660 military directives it is easy to find people guilty of something. All political parties, labor unions, and the PLO are illegal (even though Israel negotiates with the PLO). Political symbols are illegal. The Palestinian flag is illegal. A child drawing a picture of the mere outline of the Palestinian flag is committing an illegal act and can be punished. Being in a union can earn a person 20 years in prison.

Administrative detention allows the military to arrest people for being a "threat to security", but sometimes the judges say that they are going to keep the person in prison even though they know that they are not a "threat". In effect, this amounts to holding people hostage because they are guilty of being Palestinian.

Administrative detentions can be renewed indefinitely. The imprisonment and torture can go on for many years. Sometimes, on the scheduled day of release, with the family waiting to take the person home, the order is extended. Other times the detainee will reach home only to find the military police there waiting to bring him back to prison because the order has been renewed. The files on all detainees are kept secret. Neither the detainee, nor his lawyer, have any access to the information. They will never know why he is being held or for how long. Family visits are limited and require a permit. Male relatives between the ages of 16 and 46 cannot apply for a permit to visit a prisoner and visiting female relatives may have to undergo a body search.



Ayesha Mahmooda

(Photo: Bud Korotzer / NLN)

There were several other speakers at the meeting who represented civil rights organizations here in N.Y. Ayesha Mahmooda works for DRUM (Desis Rising Up and Moving), an organization with 600 members of mostly South Asian backgrounds in Queens, N.Y. The FBI has been coming into their community and asking people questions about their neighbors. The main targets are in the Muslim community where people have been asked to be informants about what is happening in their mosques. DRUM has been speaking to people in the community, going door-to-door, and telling people what their rights are and how to file complaints about the activities of the FBI. They had a press conference in front of the Flushing Library where they reported what was going on and told how racial profiling violated people's lives. DRUM has been getting help from the students at the City University of New York Law School in Queens.



Lumumba Bandele

(Photo: Bud Korotzer / NLN)

Lumumba Bandele, from the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and a teacher at Medgar Evers College (CUNY) in Brooklyn, spoke about providing support for incarcerated political activists in the U.S. He said that the description of life on the West Bank reminds him of stories he heard about life in Apartheid South Africa and that the Palestinian freedom movement should be supported. The international struggle against illegal detention, where indigenous peoples are criminalized, must be supported. There are many political prisoners in U.S. prisons today. In COINTELPRO the FBI documented their plots against community workers. Activists want to free their freedom fighters. We must control the language in the dialogue and educate the community. Hip-Hop is now being used to connect people around the world and teach people about freedom fighters, from all over, that are in prison. We should be speaking to new people, not the same ones again and again, who already agree with us. When speaking to our community, strategize. He quoted Fidel Castro saying that, “solidarity is a verb”, you have to be doing something or there is no solidarity.

The 4 speakers and the contributions from the audience made for a very informative, interesting, and, in some ways, a very sad evening. It was made clear that there is substantial understanding of what the Palestinian people are being subjected to in communities where racism is a daily fact of life. There are people in these communities that will continue to work to build solidarity with the Palestinians. Last summer there were participants from the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement in the Viva Palestina convoy breaking the Israeli siege to bring medical supplies to the people of Gaza. Also clear, was that since 9/11 the U.S. began

rounding-up people from all over the globe (the people at Guantanamo come from 17 countries), and putting them in prison without charging them with a crime, giving them no access to lawyers, holding them indefinitely, and torturing them. That is exactly what Israel had been doing for decades before the U.S. started following the same pattern in pursuing the “war on terror”. It seems to be a universal characteristic of the oppression that goes with empire building and stealing what belongs to other people. Finally, the administrative detentions, and the sadistic way they are carried out, show that the Israelis are intent on either killing every last Palestinian, as in Gaza where genocide is being actively carried out, or driving them out of their homes and off their land, as on the West Bank. The system of administrative detentions, along with the destruction of their crops, the checkpoints, the house demolitions, the wall separating them from their families, water, schools, medical care, etc, and the zealous settlers (colonists) or the IDF beating and shooting at their children as they play, creates a hell on earth for the Palestinian people. It also makes it very clear that they have absolutely no control over their lives. The daily Israeli message to them is that resistance is futile. Yet they continue to resist. Their very survival is resistance. It is incumbent on people of conscience everywhere to do what they can to help. One way is for us to educate ourselves as to what is happening there, help educate others, and support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Campaign. Zionist groups are expressing upset about the campaign, not just for financial reasons, but because it is getting people to think and talk about Israeli apartheid and the abuse of the Palestinian people. Israel’s stature and credibility in the world diminishes as the truth becomes known. We have to act quickly before it is too late, especially for the people of Gaza.



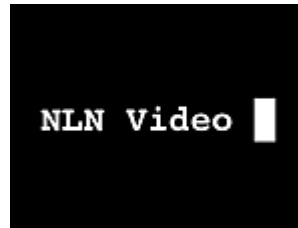
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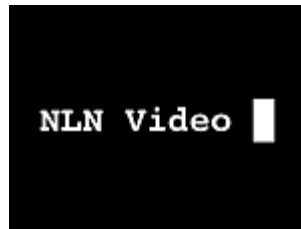


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