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Israel's Policy of Deliberate Medical Neglect Aggravate Epidemics and Skin Diseases Among Palestinian Prisoners and Detainees

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Gaza, 16 November 2024 — The Israeli Prison Service (IPS) has long implemented a policy of deliberate medical neglect toward Palestinian prisoners and detainees. While this practice has persisted for decades, it has intensified significantly since October 2023, leading to a worsening health crisis inside Israeli prisons and detention centers, including outbreaks of contagious skin diseases such as scabies, amid the highest number of Palestinians in Israeli custody ever recorded. A recent visit to Al-Naqab Prison by Al Mezan's lawyer confirms these alarming conditions.

The ongoing health crisis within Israeli incarceration facilities is a direct result of the deliberate and systematic medical neglect policy enforced by Israeli authorities, compounded by the inhumane and degrading treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, along with legislative changes enacted by the Israeli Parliament that further curtail detainees' access to medical care.

Among the most concerning outcomes of such deliberate medical neglect and inhumane treatment is the spread of scabies, a highly contagious skin disease that causes severe itching and pain. The overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in Israeli prisons and detention centers have driven this outbreak. Despite the evident risks of outbreaks of skin diseases among detainees, the IPS has intentionally refrained from implementing basic preventive measures. Israeli authorities have refused to provide adequate hygiene products, isolate infected individuals, or ensure access to medical examinations by qualified specialists, demonstrating a blatant disregard for the health and well-being of Palestinians in their custody. Palestinian prisoners' rights groups have long asserted that scabies and other skin diseases are being used as tools of torture.

On 6 November 2024, during a visit to Al-Naqab Prison, Al Mezan's lawyer documented that several detainees were suffering from scabies, with six detainees reporting painful rashes of red bumps and blisters across their bodies. Despite repeated pleas for medical attention, no treatment was provided. Over the past few months, the IPS has canceled scheduled lawyer visits to other prisons citing the outbreak of skin diseases. It has also suspended detainees' court hearings, extending their detention without due process.

The consequences of Israel's deliberate policy of medical neglect are severe and evident. In just the first half of November 2024, the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners Club [reported](#) the deaths of two Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons due to medical neglect. Samih Suleiman Mohammed Elewy, 61, from Nablus, died on 6 November 2024, while Anwar Shaban Mohammed Slim, 44, from Gaza, died on 14 November 2024. Al Mezan is also documenting numerous cases of detainees enduring severe medical neglect and physical abuse. S.J., an 18-year-old detainee, shared his harrowing experience with our lawyer: "I suffer from a urinary tract infection, severe body pain, and eye allergies. Each time I requested to see a doctor and receive treatment, the prison guards beat me."

Beyond Israel's deliberate policy of medical neglect, Palestinian prisoners and detainees are subjected to systematic abuses and severe human rights violations throughout every stage of their captivity. The process often begins with violent and dehumanizing methods of taking Palestinians into custody, during which they are forcibly stripped, physically assaulted, and, in some cases, used as [human shields](#) by the Israeli military. Many are tightly bound, blindfolded, and left exposed to extreme conditions—such as sitting under the scorching sun or on sharp

gravel—before being transferred to interrogation centers, where further forms of torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment await.

The interrogation phase is characterized by brutal physical and psychological torture. Palestinian prisoners and detainees endure horrific abuses, including hammer blows, stress positions, nail removal, prolonged hanging, attacks by dogs, severe beatings, and various forms of sexual violence. Torture also extends sensory deprivation and overload, such as confinement in rooms with deafening music, deliberately designed to break detainees both mentally and physically.

Detention conditions further contribute to ongoing and severe human rights violations. Palestinian prisoners and detainees endure sleep deprivation, inadequate bedding and blankets, limited access to showers, insufficient food and water, severe overcrowding, and prolonged denial of family and lawyer visits. These harsh measures are compounded by recent legislative amendments that strip detainees of basic legal safeguards. These include extending the ban on lawyer visits to 180 days, expanding powers under the Unlawful Combatants Law, and increasing detention periods, effectively enabling unchecked violations of their rights.

The combination of medical neglect, oppressive legislative amendments, and systematic abuse has fostered an environment of extreme suffering for Palestinian prisoners and detainees, stripping them of their fundamental rights and dignity. These practices constitute flagrant violations of international law, including the Geneva Conventions and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Furthermore, they underscore the apartheid-like policies inherent in Israel's treatment of Palestinians, both in and outside detention.

AI Mezan strongly condemns these violations and warns of the catastrophic consequences of continued neglect and abuse. We call on the international community to take immediate and decisive action to hold Israeli authorities accountable for these egregious crimes, ensure the protection of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and address the ongoing health crisis within Israeli prisons and detention centers.