

Amnesty: Prisoners killed by Iran's security forces during coronavirus protests

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Thu, 2020-04-09 23:37

LONDON: Dozens of Iranian prisoners are feared to have been killed by security forces after brutal force was used to put down protests over fears related to coronavirus spreading in the country's jails.

Thousands of inmates in at least eight Iranian prisons have recently taken part in protests as they fear being infected with COVID-19 in jails that are overcrowded, lack hygiene and have poor ventilation, Amnesty International reported on Thursday.

The protests were lethally repressed by prison officers and security officers, leading to the deaths.

Amnesty said in a press release that authorities responded with live ammunition and tear gas, killing some 35 inmates and wounding hundreds of others.

It added that security forces beat protesters in at least one prison, "possibly leading to the death of an inmate."

Amnesty told Arab News: "Many of Iran's prisons have unacceptable detention conditions, including overcrowding, poor ventilation, limited hot water, inadequate food, insufficient beds and insect infestations.

"They can therefore be highly susceptible to viral outbreaks. There is also often a lack access for prisoners to prompt medical assistance, medicines, adequate medical facilities, and hygiene and sanitary products."

Diana Eltahawy, Amnesty's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, called the Iranian authorities' response to the prison demonstrations "abhorrent," and said "an independent investigation into the torture and deaths in custody is urgently needed."

She added: "It is abhorrent that instead of responding to prisoners' legitimate demands to be protected from COVID-19, Iranian authorities have yet again resorted to killing people to silence their concerns.

"Security forces must be instructed to immediately cease the use of unlawful lethal force, and to refrain from punishing prisoners calling for their right to health."

Amnesty told Arab News: "We have seen reports that prisoners who have displayed COVID-19 symptoms are not being tested and are often being treated in the medical care facilities of prisons, which do not have specialist facilities to deal with the virus."

It said although the authorities have announced inmates being released, prisoners of conscience remain jailed and are treated with contempt.

"Hundreds of prisoners of conscience, including human rights lawyers, workers' rights activists, anti-death penalty campaigners and those jailed

simply for their religious beliefs ... are languishing in prison solely for peacefully exercising their rights," Amnesty added.

"Some have health issues which they have either developed in prison or which have exacerbated in detention. Many of them have been denied adequate health care because the Iranian authorities routinely deny access to adequate medical care as a secondary punishment to these individuals."

Amnesty urged the authorities to release prisoners of conscience, along with people in pre-trial detention and those most at risk from the virus.

Iran, one of the countries worst-hit by the pandemic, on Thursday reported 117 new COVID-19 deaths, bringing the total number of fatalities to 4,110. It also declared 1,634 new cases of the virus, taking the total number of cases to 66,220.

The country's real figures are believed to be much higher. There have also been reports of several prison riots and jail breaks in Iran in recent weeks.



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AmnestyKhamenei: Mass Ramadan events in Iran may stop over virus

US urges Houthis to reciprocate Arab coalition ceasefire in Yemen

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Thu, 2020-04-09 23:18

LONDON: The United States on Thursday urged the Houthis to reciprocate a ceasefire in Yemen announced by the Arab coalition on Wednesday due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"The announcement is a constructive response to the UN Secretary General's call for the parties to focus on countering the COVID-19 pandemic," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a statement.

"We urge the Houthis to respond in kind to the coalition's initiative," he said.

Pompeo also thanked King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for supporting the decision to announce a ceasefire.

The two-week ceasefire in Yemen started at midday on Thursday.

Later Thursday, the UK's foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, said the ceasefire was an "important step towards the permanent ceasefire Yemenis need."

"I urge the Government of Yemen and the Houthis to immediately cease all hostilities and engage constructively with these proposals," he said. "We must grasp this precious opportunity for peace in Yemen."



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Arab coalition's Yemen ceasefire receives wide supportArab coalition announces two-week ceasefire in Yemen

[Hamas arrests Palestinians in Gaza for Zoom video chat with Israelis](#)

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Reuters

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Thu, 2020-04-09 17:53

GAZA: Hamas arrested a Palestinian in Gaza on Thursday, saying that he had taken part in a video conference with Israelis and describing his act as

“treason.”

The Gaza interior ministry identified the man as Rami Aman and said that some of his associates, whose details were not disclosed, had also been arrested. Aman describes himself as a freelance journalist and member of a group called The Gaza Youth Committee on his Facebook page. The meeting for which he was arrested was held on Monday on the Zoom video conference app. It appears to have been organized by Israeli peace activists, who could not be reached for comment.

An invitation link to a Zoom conference entitled ‘Meet Gazan Activists’ was posted on a Facebook event page that has since expired. It read: “Finally, an opportunity to speak with Gazans who not only do not hate us but are working tirelessly to open channel of communication between Gazans and Israelis.”

It also named Rami Aman and his group as participants.

“Holding any activity or any contact with the Israeli occupation under any cover is a crime punishable by law and is treason to our people and their sacrifices,” Interior Ministry spokesman Eyad Al-Bozom said in a statement. Aman’s family could not be reached for comment and two Gaza-based human rights groups contacted by Reuters said they have not been approached by relatives over his arrest.

Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007 and has since fought three wars with Israel. Flare-ups along the shared border are relatively frequent. Israel regards Hamas as a terrorist group and keeps Gaza under blockade, saying its aim is to stop weapons from reaching militant groups.

Coronavirus lockdowns have driven a surge in the usage of Zoom in recent weeks because it is free, and users are attracted by its ease of use. But concerns have grown over its lack of end-to-end encryption of meeting sessions, routing of traffic through China and “zombombing,” when uninvited guests crash meetings.

The incident triggered angry comments on social media by Palestinians in Gaza, with many praising Aman’s arrest.



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[Sudan raises bread price, year after Bashir's fall](#)

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Wed, 2020-04-08 18:08

KHARTOUM: Sudanese authorities on Wednesday announced a rise in the price of bread in the capital Khartoum, nearly a year after the fall of President Omar Al-Bashir.

A tripling of the price of bread had been the trigger for street protests

against Bashir in December 2018 – demonstrations that went on for months until the army deposed the longtime ruler on April 11 last year. Wednesday's change will mean that one Sudanese pound buys only a 50 gram loaf of bread, compared to 70 grams previously, according to Khartoum state governor Ahmed Abdoun.

In mid-December 2018, the price of bread had been hiked from one pound for a 70 gram loaf to three Sudanese pounds in parts of the country, triggering the social unrest that turned into mass anti-Bashir demonstrations.



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Sudan deploys heavy security on anniversary of mass march
Former Sudan strongman Omar Al-Bashir gets 2 years for corruption

[Organization of Islamic Cooperation](#)

slams Israeli treatment of Palestinian inmates

Author:

Wed, 2020-04-08 21:17

JEDDAH: The rights body of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on Wednesday expressed concern over reports of ill treatment meted out to more than 5,000 Palestinian prisoners, including women and children, languishing in Israeli jails.

The OIC's Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) said amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the lack of mandatory basic hygiene and health facilities in Israeli jails is a matter of concern.

It called on Israeli authorities to provide incarcerated Palestinians with basic facilities, in accordance with Article 76 of the Geneva Convention and relevant provisions of international human rights and humanitarian laws.

The IPHRC said Israel, the "occupying power," routinely flouts its international obligations under the illegal and immoral pretext of "administrative detentions" by indefinitely detaining Palestinian children and innocent civilians, without charge and without access to justice.

"In view of the global health emergency, precarious hygienic conditions, inadequate health services and overcrowded Israeli prisons constitute perfect conditions for the catastrophic spread of the pandemic, putting the lives of inmates at grave risk and creating an environment for major unrest in the prisons," the IPHRC said.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has urged all governments to "examine ways to release those particularly vulnerable to this pandemic," including "those detained without sufficient legal basis, political prisoners and others detained simply for expressing critical or dissenting views."

The IPHRC urged the international community, especially the UN, to pressure Israel to release all those arbitrarily detained without any legal basis, and those particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, as well as to safeguard the human rights of all Palestinian inmates.



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