

# Hunger striker's release highlights plight of Palestinian prisoners

Fri, 2022-02-25 21:56

RAMALLAH: The joy of freed Palestinian prisoner Hisham Abu Hawash was matched only by the delight of his family and friends, as well as the hundreds worldwide who followed his 141-day hunger strike.

Abu Hawash was released on Feb. 24 after spending 16 months in Israeli detention.

The 40-year old construction worker from Dura, Hebron, was first arrested by Israeli forces on Oct. 27, 2020 and placed under a six-month administrative detention order.

Later, the order was arbitrarily extended to Feb. 27, 2022.

Israel released Abu Hawash at the end of his sentence amid growing Palestinian public anger, as well as criticism from international human rights organizations, the EU and UN.

However, Abu Hawash's case is just one of many. Of the 4,500 Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel, 540 are being detained without trial. Among them are 41 women and 140 children under 18.

Israeli prison authorities imposed strict punitive measures on Palestinian prisoners following the escape of six inmates from Gilboa prison in September 2021.

Qadoura Faris, director of the Palestinian Prisoners Club, told Arab News that inmates face daily problems caused by the prison administration, which is seeking to destroy their collective efforts over the years to improve living conditions in detention.

He said that this process follows an Israeli committee's recommendation to "make the prisoners' lives difficult."

Israel has arrested almost 1 million Palestinians since its occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip in 1967, Faris said.

"No sun has risen since the beginning of the Israeli occupation without daily arrests," he added.

Detentions are part of a systematic plan to sap Palestinian communities' will to resist and also to create fear, Faris said.

Despite the relative calm in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, human rights organizations say that even something as minor as a Facebook post can lead to arrests and a trial if Israeli authorities view it as incitement.

Israeli security targets Palestinians aged from 19 to 25 in order to deter them from protests and activism, while fines imposed on prisoners by Israeli courts swell the Israeli budget.

Meanwhile, the struggle of dozens of Palestinian prisoners continues from behind bars, even as dozens are enrolled with universities and are pursuing studies at all academic levels.

Some have contested legislative elections while serving time.

The education initiative was led by Marwan Barghouti, a senior Fatah leader serving five life sentences in an Israeli prison for leading the second Palestinian intifada from 2000 to 2004.

While Palestinians consider those behind bars in Israel "freedom fighters," many Israelis describe them as "terrorists," saying they tried to kill Israelis and should die in prison.

The issue touches almost every family and neighborhood, and most Palestinians believe that the Palestinian Authority should make prisoners' freedom a top priority.

Prisoners and their families hoped the election of US President Joe Biden would kick-start the Israel-Palestine peace process, and that prisoner releases would be a crucial issue in any negotiations.

However, as these hopes fade, it appears only an expected prisoner swap between Hamas and Israel can deliver freedom to those, including the infirm, women and children, who have spent more than 20 years behind bars.



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## [Suffering in Syria is at its highest level since crisis began: UN](#)

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-25 00:27

BEIRUT: A record number of people in Syria are in need of humanitarian assistance more than a decade into a devastating civil war, the UN said. At least 14.6 million people in Syria are in need of humanitarian aid, up from 13.4 million last year, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said in a report.

"Suffering in Syria is at its highest level since the crisis began," said the UN deputy regional humanitarian coordinator for the Syria conflict, Mark Cutts.

"The UN and its partners are reaching 7 million people every month, but more

support is required,” he said in a post on Twitter.

The war in Syria is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions more since it began with a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests in 2011.

The country is also grappling with an economic crisis compounded by Western sanctions, the COVID-19 pandemic and a sharp fall in the value of the Syrian pound.

Over three quarters of households – 76 percent – are unable to meet their most basic needs, an increase of 10 percent from last year, OCHA said.

Syria’s internally displaced population makes up 37 percent of the people requiring humanitarian assistance, the report said.

People who have never been displaced or who returned to their place of origin before January 2021, are also increasingly unable to meet basic needs, OCHA said, calling it an “indication” of the growing scale of the crisis.

In 2021, 9.2 million vulnerable residents were estimated to be in need, according to OCHA.



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# UN expert urges Sudan forces to stop shooting anti-coup protesters

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-25 00:04

KHARTOUM: A UN expert has urged Sudanese forces to stop firing live ammunition and tear gas at anti-coup protesters in a crackdown that has killed more than 80 people.

Demonstrations have continued in the northeast African country since army chief Gen. Abdel Fattah Al-Burhan led a military takeover on Oct. 25, sparking international condemnation and suspension of aid.

The putsch derailed a fragile power-sharing agreement between the army and civilians negotiated after the 2019 ouster of longtime President Omar Bashir. "Firing live ammunition on the people is a huge violation against human rights," said the UN expert, Adama Dieng.

"I'm concerned about the violations (committed by) the authorities and the use of live ammunition against protesters," he said, putting the toll at 82 dead and 2,000 wounded.

Both the UN and the US have made similar appeals before, with Washington threatening further "consequences" if violence continues. A Sudanese man shot dead on Sunday was the latest fatality.

The Senegalese envoy has been in Sudan for the past four days, meeting with leaders, diplomats and civil society members in a bid to shed light on the crackdown.

"I am calling for fair, independent and professional investigation on the violence against protesters," he told journalists in Khartoum.

Dieng also expressed concern about sexual violence and ongoing raids against anti-coup groups as well as the fate of around 100 detainees who "have never met their lawyers."

As he spoke, an AFP correspondent reported that security forces fired more tear gas at demonstrators protesting the coup.

Sudanese authorities have said they arrested several police and soldiers who fired at demonstrators with Kalashnikov rifles, disobeying orders.





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## [Turkey in tough spot over Russia-Ukraine crisis](#)

Thu, 2022-02-24 23:54

ANKARA: As Russia launched air and ground assaults on Ukraine, NATO member Turkey finds itself in a delicate position for maintaining its good relations with both countries.

Its control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, key routes during such a crisis, made Turkey an indispensable partner for the West.

On Thursday, Ukraine asked Turkey to close the straits to Russian vessels.

Turkey, which has maritime borders with Ukraine and Russia, has the legal authority to control the straits under the 1936 Montreux Convention, that gives Ankara exclusive rights to restrict the passage of warships not

belonging to countries bordering the Black Sea.

During wartime or under threat of aggression, Turkey can close the straits to the transit of all foreign warships, while non-Black Sea countries and littoral states should notify Ankara 15 days and 8 days in advance, respectively, for sending vessels.

For Soner Cagaptay, director of the Turkish program at the Washington Institute, if Ankara denied naval access to Russia into the Black Sea, it would open a can of worms, with the area a maritime condominium shared by Turkey and Russia.

“In that case, Moscow would ask to renegotiate the Montreux Convention and Turkey would never get a deal as good as (the) Montreux regime again. It is the reason why Ankara will not violate the existing convention,” he told Arab News.

Turkey’s gatekeeping over the straits will now test the limits of its neutral stance vis-a-vis Russia and Ukraine.

In a press statement on Wednesday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey would not abandon either Russia or Ukraine.

“Turkey is currently not in a position to sacrifice its relations with Ukraine or Russia as it has developed significant strategic links with both countries in the last few years,” Prof. Emre Ersen, an expert on Russia-Turkey relations from Marmara University in Istanbul, told Arab News.

“Therefore, it will most likely continue to call for an immediate diplomatic resolution of the conflict.”

At the same time, Ersen thinks Ankara will try to implement the clauses of the Montreux Convention strictly, since this document gives Turkey the opportunity to stay neutral without having to choose a side in the current crisis.

Turkey, which finds itself in a tough spot, has close ties with Ukraine in the defense industry as it sells its drones and has an active defense deal of co-production, while it is also heavily dependent on Russian gas and defense procurement.

Turkey receives about 33 percent of its natural gas and 66 percent of wheat from Russia.

With tourism season approaching, Ukrainian and Russian tourists traditionally make up almost one fifth of Turkey’s total visitors.

But Ankara, which officially described Russian moves against Ukraine as unacceptable, still stands against applying any sanctions on Russia – which presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Kalin recently described as “useless” – and prefers de-escalation through diplomatic means and dialogue.

Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based Russia analyst, thinks that Turkey has so far

opted for a moderate stance on the Ukrainian crisis by urging the parties to follow common sense.

“However, for a year Turkey has followed a strictly pro-Ukrainian stance, which will push Russia to take a more cautious and skeptical stance against any diplomatic move by the country,” he told Arab News.

According to Sezer, if Turkey opens its Black Sea waterways to the fleets of the Western powers or if it shares any intelligence with the West about any aerial threat against Ukraine, Russia will take it as a *casus belli*, a justification for war.

With a statement on Thursday, Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged Russia to immediately end the “unjust and unlawful action” and underlined Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

Under Montreux, aircraft carriers should also seek permission from the Turkish government when crossing over the straits.

However, for Ersen, compared with the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, it will be much more difficult for Ankara to follow a middle-way policy between Russia and the West.

In 2008, Turkey denied permissions to large US military ships to enter the Black Sea based on Montreux upon Russia’s military intervention in Georgia.

“Turkey’s NATO allies will definitely increase their pressure on Ankara to reconsider its special relationship with Moscow which could also cause significant repercussions for Turkish-Russian relations, especially with regard to thorny issues like the Syrian civil war and the Russian-made S-400 missiles,” Ersen said.

Despite its strained ties with NATO upon the purchase of the Russian defense system, Turkey regained its importance within the alliance in supporting Ukraine.

Samuel Ramani, associate fellow at the Royal United Service Institute, thinks that Turkey is trying to show its solidarity with NATO consensus by supporting Ukraine’s territorial integrity.

“Turkey has also viewed Ukraine as a key partner since 2010, as it burnishes its Black Sea power status and provides it with useful commercial deals, especially in the munitions and drone spheres,” he told Arab News.

He added: “In this crisis, Turkey has tried to show its value to NATO by offering itself as a venue for talks that would complement what France is doing. The talks have not taken place and the US views Turkey’s role skeptically.”

According to Ramani, Turkey will still be a voice of support for diplomacy and oppose sanctions on Russia, as it needs to work with Moscow in several other theaters like Syria, Libya and the South Caucasus.



“However, Turkey could also use its Montreux Convention derived status to bolster its image as a contributor to Black Sea security and sell drones to Ukraine if they are requested,” he said.



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## [Drugs, tribes, politics a deadly mix in Iraq border province](#)

Author:

Thu, 2022-02-24 23:54

AMARAH: A judge shot dead with 15 bullets from a Kalashnikov. A policeman gunned down. Local figures from rival political groups and influential armed factions killed.

The murders all happened in January and February in one Iraqi province, Maysan, which borders Iran and where drug trafficking, tribal disputes and political score-settling have combined in a toxic mix reflecting the country's broader political divisions and struggle against corruption.

War-scarred Iraq is trying to recover from years of violence after the 2003 US-led invasion which toppled dictator Saddam Hussein. Normality often hangs by a thread.

But in Maysan, violence is a near-daily occurrence with police and judicial officials regular targets of assassination attempts.

"Drug trafficking and tribal conflicts are the two main causes of the deteriorating security situation in Maysan," independent MP Osama Karim Al-Badr said in the provincial capital Amarah.

February has been particularly bloody.

First came the assassination of police officer Hossam Al-Aliawi.

Judge Ahmed Faisal, who specialized in drug cases, was next to die. He was headed home when assailants blocked his route and opened fire, a police officer told AFP on condition of anonymity.

A month earlier, a prominent member from the movement of powerful Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr was killed.

Sadr's bloc emerged as the largest in parliament after October's elections. Months of intense negotiations among political factions since then have raised tensions while failing to form a majority parliamentary coalition that would name a new prime minister to replace Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

On the same day that Al-Kadhimi visited Maysan in an effort to address the violence another murder occurred. The victim was a member of Saraya Al-Salam, an armed faction affiliated with Sadr.

Al-Kadhimi ordered a reshuffle of top security officials and warned: "We have two choices in front of us: the State or chaos."

Over the past years, Iraq has seen a surge in the sale and use of drugs, particularly in central and southern provinces that border Iran and which often serve as main routes for narcotics, particularly the stimulant crystal meth.

Iraq's Interior Ministry says Maysan has one of the highest rates of trafficking and consumption of drugs, and the provincial Security chief Gen. Mohammed Jassem Al-Zubaidi conceded that Maysan has served as a "route for drug trafficking."

His forces carry out daily raids, and “every day, we confiscate arms,” he told AFP. Security forces also arrested dozens of people within the span of days.

But according to activist and journalist Sabah Al-Silawi, efforts have been hampered by the dominance of tribal traditions, which run deeper in Maysan than elsewhere. Tribes often resort to their own code of conduct and traditions to resolve personal conflicts or even deadly fights, avoiding turning to the authorities.



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