

## **Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Jails in the wake of Oslo**

This study discusses the experience of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails following the signing of Oslo Peace Accords in 1993. The study is based on an assumption that suggests that the signature of the peace accords will subsequently end the state of war and animosity between the Palestinian and the Israeli parties and will open a new era based on reconciliation and mutual recognition. For many people, this assumption entails the release of all political prisoners from Israeli jails.

The study deals with the problem that Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails have faced since the Declaration of Principles was signed on September 13<sup>th</sup>, 1993 neglecting their issues, and without a single article tackling their question and their future. This fact created many problematic issues in the agreements that followed, for the issue has been dealt with in accordance with the Israeli perception of the Palestinian prisoner as being "criminal" and "terrorist". Such treatment deprived the Palestinian prisoner of the right of being a "Prisoner of War" and represented a scandalous violation of International Humanitarian Law; a matter that created a great sense of frustration and resentment among prisoners who expressed this in severe criticism of the agreements.

The importance of the study stems from the fact that it deals with one of the most volatile and widely discussed issues in Palestinian society; it concerns every Palestinian since it is a profound human issue in an era which is supposed to be one of peace. The study is also essential since there has never been any special academic research conducted on the Palestinian prisoners' movement and experiences in the wake of the Oslo Accords. It is worth mentioning that all written material on this issue does not go beyond articles in newspapers, statements, and reports by various human rights organizations. Depending mainly on an analysis of primary resources written by prisoners and which represent documents that record developments at the various levels and conditions of their lives during the period under study makes this research unique.

The study is divided into five chapters. The agreements signed in and following 1993 have been studied carefully and analyzed in relation to the Palestinian prisoners in terms of their impact on the prisoners and on the Palestinian society and grassroots in general. The overwhelming reaction to the agreements was one of resentment. Unable to guarantee the release of Palestinian prisoners, such agreements were considered ineffective. Therefore, prisoners organized several protests, including open hunger strikes, calling for their immediate release and reflecting themselves strongly in supportive grassroots public measures and activities.

The study also aims at discussing how the peace agreements were unable to positively address the living and humane conditions of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. It was expected that after signing the peace accords, improvements of

prisoners living conditions would follow. To the prisoners' disappointment this did not happen. In fact what happened was completely the opposite for many of the prisoners' rights were violated and their conditions regressed instead of improving.

The study tackles the role of international law and the position of Palestinian prisoners in international humanitarian law especially in light of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949, and the principles of the United Nations. The study shows how international law is applicable to the question of Palestinian prisoners. It emphasizes the legal stand of Palestinian prisoners as prisoners of war. Israel, in spite of its agreements with the PLO, does not recognize this interpretation. The Oslo Accords have not tackled the legal position of the Palestinian prisoner which opened the door for Israel's manipulation and its imposition of its own measures and conditions on the release process and on its way of dealing with prisoners inside prisons.

The thesis; therefore, is that the Oslo agreements have created so much suffering for Palestinian prisoners and did not lead to the immediate release that was expected according to the principles of international law. This has led to a state of depression, frustration and loss of confidence among prisoners who had high hopes and who expected that the moment a peace agreement was signed, they would be released. It also led to many internal problems inside jails in terms of weakening the unity of the prisoners, losing interest in academic and intellectual life and regression in the prisoners' programs that aim to improve the living conditions inside jails.