

# Tour depicts Israel's Kafkaesque punishment for Palestinians

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Philadelphia

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A national tour organized to highlight the use of administrative detention, an inhumane punishment aimed at Palestinian political prisoners, visited a number of U.S. cities from Nov. 3 to Nov. 20. Administrative detention is a cruel form of arrest that offers the accused man, woman or even child no charges to dispute, no trial and no limit to their maximum sentence.

Organized by the Palestinian Community Network and the Palestine Solidarity Group, the tour featured Ala Jaradat, program manager of Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association based in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

On Nov. 13, Jaradat gave a presentation in Philadelphia entitled, "Israel's Palestinian Prisoners, America's other Guantánamo: A Report on the Conditions of Palestinian Prisoners." Jaradat's reference to the U.S. stems from its annual contributions of \$2.25 billion in military aid to Israel, a huge subsidy which helps cover the costs of military courts that oversee administrative detention.

Jaradat, a former political prisoner, provided an informative and in-depth look at the use of arbitrary torture, isolation and other forms of political repression. The focus of his talk was Israel's use of this cruel and unusual punishment against nearly 1 million Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967.

This practice was initiated by the British in 1945 and used against both Jews and Palestinians in the occupied territory. The Israeli state finely honed its depraved edge to be used against Palestinians after the June 1967 war, during which Israel seized the West Bank and Gaza.

Administrative detention is a convenient way to round up civil and political activists, teachers and union leaders. Although it shares similarities with regular arrests that include the possible demolition of homes and use of torture, it differs in its totally arbitrary nature. Neither type of incarceration rules out use of the other and many people have experienced both.

Here's how it works: A military order is issued against a person and the arrest is made. There is an eight-day window for interrogation, which routinely involves some form of torture. A judicial hearing is then held, presided over by a military

judge and attended by the military prosecutor, the accused individual and their lawyer, if they have one.

The charges are often secret or based upon secret information and therefore no defense is possible. A sentence of up to six months can be imposed with no cap on the number of times it can be extended. Since not all extensions are accompanied by a hearing, the prisoner may be the last to learn of it.

For example, a prisoner who has served a total of six years on extended sentences, each of three months, has experienced 24 chances for release. Even when released there is no guarantee that the next order for arrest won't be made just outside the prison gate or at the first roadblock checkpoint. That's a lot of dashed hopes for the prisoner and her or his loved ones.

There is a system of appeals. However, in 2007 detainees submitted 2,368 appeals. The courts accepted only 33. By comparison the prosecution submitted appeals in 241 cases and the court accepted 161. Franz Kafka's novel "The Trial" could hardly evoke a greater nightmare.

Like conditions for most prisoners in Israeli jails, conditions for those held under administrative detention are deplorable. Prisoners suffer from inedible food, poor health care and little protection from the elements in open-air prisons. The clothing they wear is what they were arrested in, often stained with their own blood. Visitation rules are arbitrary and subject to transmutation by the Israeli military, and visitation requests are frequently denied.

The impact of administrative detention on the prisoners is pretty clear, but the crippling impact on communities is also a terrible burden. Families gather to welcome a detained loved one, only to have an extension block their homecoming. The hopes, dreams and work of communities striving for basic human rights are disrupted and derailed. Clearly it's a form of collective punishment.

Held at the University of Pennsylvania, the meeting was co-sponsored by Penn for Palestine, and endorsed by the Philadelphia International Action Center, Sustain, Philadelphia Jews for a Just Peace, Philadelphia Against War and Socialist Action.

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