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Israel: Detainees Face Inhumane Treatment

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Degrading Photos Circulated; Acts Amount to War Crimes

(Jerusalem) – [Israeli](#) forces have been publishing degrading photographs and videos of detained Palestinians, including children, a form of inhumane treatment and an outrage on their personal dignity that amount to war crimes, Human Rights Watch said today.

In many cases, detainees were stripped of their clothing, sometimes fully, then photographed or filmed, with the images published by Israeli soldiers, media outlets, or activists. Forced nudity followed by capturing and sharing sexualized images on social media is a form of sexual violence and also a war crime.

“Israeli authorities have for months turned a blind eye as members of their military published dehumanizing fully or seminude images and videos of Palestinians in their custody,” said [Balkees Jarrah](#), acting Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “Senior officials and military commanders can be held criminally responsible for ordering these crimes, or for failing to prevent or punish them, including at the International Criminal Court.”

Israeli military officials have [publicly denounced some](#) of their members for publishing images of the detainees, but as far as Human Rights Watch has been able to determine, the government has not publicly condemned the underlying treatment of Palestinian detainees depicted in the images. Judicial authorities have not announced any prosecutions for these crimes. On July 15, Human Rights Watch [wrote](#) to the Public Diplomacy Office of the Israeli military but has not received a response.

Since October, Israeli forces have [reportedly](#) detained thousands of Palestinians from Gaza at Sde Teiman, an army base in southern Israel, where they have been [reportedly](#) ill-treated and tortured, and where at least 36 died in custody, according to media reports. As of July, [124](#) Palestinians remained at Sde Teiman, according to the Times of Israel, despite the Israeli attorney general [calling](#) on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to transfer detainees out of the facility due to the reports of abuse and deaths in custody.

Human Rights Watch analyzed 37 of the posts depicting captured Palestinians, predominantly men and boys in Gaza and the West Bank, often stripped to their underwear and in some cases completely naked, handcuffed, blindfolded, and injured. Some posts included demeaning and humiliating captions by Israeli soldiers or journalists. Platforms like TikTok and YouTube have removed some of these posts.

Between October 25 and December 28, one Israeli soldier, who according to his social media holds United States citizenship, published at least seven photos and videos of Palestinian men detained by his unit in the West Bank. In the images, the clothed detainees are handcuffed, many of them are blindfolded, and some have Israeli flags placed on them.

In two videos, published on October 28 and 29, the soldier places US dollar bills on the knees of two handcuffed, blindfolded, and squatting men, as a “blessing” while he mocks them and asks them to repeat phrases in Hebrew. The soldier also posted degrading captions, such as “trolling Hamas,” to accompany some of the published images.

In another case, an Israeli soldier in Gaza published a photo on Facebook on December 8, showing at least 22 detained males in a single file, all stripped to their underwear, some of them blindfolded. At least two detainees appear to be children. The caption says: “As part of our mission we kept Hamas terrorists under arrest. We’ll settle for this picture, there are pictures not for publication ...”

Another image posted on Instagram, by an Israeli soldier, who according to [media reports](#) holds US citizenship, shows what appears to be a photograph of himself standing in front of at least six men with their backs to the camera, stripped to their underwear and kneeling on the ground while handcuffed and blindfolded, with their arms above their head. The caption of the now deleted photo says: “Mom I think I freed palestine” [sic].

Two separate investigations by the BBC on the conduct of Israeli soldiers, in [February](#) in Gaza, and in [May](#) in the West Bank, found that Israeli soldiers uploaded to social media platforms dozens of images and videos intended to humiliate Palestinians, including images of detainees who had

been stripped to their underwear and others who had been draped in Israeli flags.

The Israeli military [told](#) the BBC that it had terminated the service of one reservist and that this conduct did not represent its values. In a response to another BBC investigation, the Israeli military [said](#) it had instructed soldiers “to avoid uploading footage of operational activities to social media networks,” and while it did not condemn any specific acts, it said that soldiers were “disciplined and even suspended from reserve duty” in the event of “unacceptable behavior.” The military spokesperson, [Daniel Hagari](#), and national security advisor, [Tzachi Hanegbi](#), separately commented in December that people who surrendered or were arrested needed to be stripped to be searched, as they could be carrying explosives or weapons, but that clothes should be returned to them and any photos taken should not be distributed. Hagari said the photos were “unusual” and that disciplinary measures will be taken in any event that is inconsistent with the Israeli military’s values. Hangebi said the photos “served no purpose.” The Israeli military gave no further details on holding those responsible accountable.

In its May 2024 [report](#), the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel concluded that the forced public stripping, nudity, and related “specific persecutory acts” against Palestinian men and boys in Israeli custody were either ordered or condoned by Israeli authorities, given the frequency of these abuses, the way these acts were filmed and photographed, and that they occurred in several locations.

Sexual violence and committing “outrages upon personal dignity” on detainees are serious violations of international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, applicable to all parties to the hostilities in Israel and Palestine.

On [October 7](#), Hamas-led Palestinian [armed groups](#), in what [amount to](#) war crimes and crimes against humanity, attacked southern Israel, killing 815 civilians, according to [Agence France-Presse](#), and taking 251 people hostage. Since then, Israeli forces have unlawfully attacked residential buildings, medical facilities, and aid workers, largely [destroying Gaza’s civilian infrastructure, including its water and electricity plants](#). Israel is using [starvation](#) as a weapon of war in Gaza, where about 90 percent of the population have been [displaced](#), many of them repeatedly.

Gaza’s Health Ministry has [reported](#) over 38,000 deaths and 88,000 injuries. These abuses occur amid the ongoing Israeli [crimes against humanity](#) of [apartheid](#) and persecution against Palestinians.

Common article 3 of the Geneva Conventions requires that everyone in the custody of a warring party “shall in all circumstances be treated humanely.” Prohibited acts include “outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment.” Violations of article 3 are war crimes.

The International Criminal Court (ICC), in its [Elements of Crimes](#) explanation of the Rome Statute crimes, defines “outrages upon personal dignity” as acts in which “[t]he perpetrator humiliated, degraded or otherwise violated the dignity of one or more persons [and] the severity of the humiliation, degradation or other violation was of such degree as to be generally recognized as an outrage upon personal dignity.”

On May 20, the ICC prosecutor, Karim Khan, [announced](#) that he was seeking arrest warrants against two senior Israeli officials and three Hamas leaders. Khan confirmed that his office has been conducting an investigation since March 2021 into atrocity crimes committed in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that since 2014, his office has jurisdiction over crimes in the current hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups that covers unlawful conduct by all parties.

“International law recognizes the inherent dignity of human beings caught in a conflict, no matter what side they are on,” Jarrah said. “Victims have a right to justice and accountability, and any evidence of sexual violence should be investigated urgently in a way that is thorough, credible, and prioritizes the needs, well-being, and wishes of the survivors.”

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