

Ramallah, March 19, 2020

## Defence for Children International

Palestine calls on Israeli authorities to take immediate action to release all Palestinian child detainees in Israeli prisons due to the rapid global spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Palestinian children imprisoned by Israeli authorities live in close proximity to each other, often in compromised sanitary conditions, with limited access to resources to maintain minimum hygiene routines, according to documentation

collected by DCIP. COVID-19's impact is exacerbated by these living conditions making Palestinian children in Israeli prisons and detention centres increasingly vulnerable.

As of March 19, 573 Israelis had tested positive for the COVID-19 virus, according to [Ha'aretz](#). Four Palestinian prisoners detained at Israel's Megiddo prison, located inside Israel northwest of the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, were placed in isolation after they were in contact with a COVID-19 positive Israeli officer, according to [Ha'aretz](#). Megiddo prison is one of several detention facilities located inside Israel where Palestinian child "security prisoners" are held.

"We know the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is for people to avoid being in close proximity to each other," said Ayed Abu Eqtaish, Accountability Program director at DCIP. "There is no way Israeli prison authorities can ensure the health and well-being of Palestinian child detainees as long as they continue to be in a custodial detention setting."

An [investigation](#) by DCIP previously found Palestinian child prisoners detained in Israel's Damon prison were held in poor conditions, including small rooms without access to clean and private bathroom facilities. Conditions such as these increase risks and exposure to unsanitary conditions where the COVID-19 virus thrives.

In a headcount at the end of December 2019, 186 Palestinian children were detained in Israeli prisons, according to the latest figures released by the Israel Prison Service. While international law demands that children only be detained as a measure of last resort, custodial pre-trial detention is the norm for Palestinian children detained by Israeli forces from the occupied West Bank.

Israel has the dubious distinction of being the only country in the world that automatically and systematically detains and prosecutes children in military courts that lack fundamental fair trial rights and protections. Israel detains and prosecutes between 500 and 700 Palestinian children in military courts each year. Nearly three out of four Palestinian children detained by Israeli forces experiences some form of physical violence, according to documentation collected by DCIP.

Since 1967, Israel has operated two separate legal systems in the same territory. In the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlers are subject to the civilian and criminal legal system whereas Palestinians live under military law. No Israeli child comes into contact with the military courts.

Israel ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, obligating itself to implement the full range of rights and protections included in the treaty, including that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting children. The CRC demands that children must only be detained as a measure of last resort, and obliges states to ensure and protect the right to life, survival, and development, as well as the right to health.

As of March 18, worldwide there are 191,127 cases of COVID-19, and 7,807 fatalities, according to the [World Health Organization](#).



Israeli forces detain a young Palestinian protester in the occupied West Bank city of Bethlehem on December 22, 2017. (Photo: AFP / Musa Al Shaer)