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Israel/OPT: Ahed Tamimi release a bittersweet moment as other Palestinian children languish in Israeli jails

The release of a Palestinian child activist jailed by Israel's military for shoving, slapping and kicking two heavily armed soldiers wearing protective gear is welcome news but serves as a reminder of Israel's continued human rights violations against Palestinian children, Amnesty International said.

Seventeen-year-old Ahed Tamimi was set free today, 21 days short of completing an eight-month prison sentence following her wrongful imprisonment by Ofer military court in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

"This is a huge relief for Ahed Tamimi's loved ones, but their joy will be tempered by the injustice of her imprisonment and the grim knowledge that many more Palestinian children still languish in Israeli jails, many despite not having committed any recognizable crime," said Saleh Higazi, Head of Office in Jerusalem for Amnesty International.

"Ahed Tamimi's release must not obscure the familiar and continuing story of the Israeli military using discriminatory policies to lock up Palestinian children. Her unjust imprisonment is a reminder of how the Israeli occupation uses the arbitrary military courts to punish those who challenge the occupation and illegal settlements expansion policies, without any regard to age."

"Hundreds of Palestinian children continue to face the harsh conditions and abuse of the Israeli penitentiary system that flouts the principles of juvenile justice and standards for the treatment of prisoners," Saleh Higazi said.

Ahed Tamimi was convicted of incitement, aggravated assault and obstructing Israeli soldiers after a video showing her shoving, slapping and kicking two Israeli soldiers in her home village of Nabi Saleh on 15 December 2017 went viral on Facebook.

She was arrested on 19 December 2017 after her mother Nariman Tamimi, also a prominent activist, posted the footage of her altercation with Israeli soldiers

online. Nariman Tamimi was also released today, after being sentenced to eight months in prison on similar charges.

Ahed Tamimi's father, Bassam Tamimi, told Amnesty International that despite his family's joy in welcoming Ahed and Nariman home, he was still worried about his son, Wa'ed, who was arrested in May. The 22-year-old has been detained in Ofer military prison ever since facing charges related to his activism against the occupation.

"My son is still in Israeli prison for the duration of military court proceedings against him, which is a reminder that Israel's occupation is always seeking to punish us because our existence contradicts the existence of the occupation. And so, I call on members of international community to uphold their responsibility towards our people and take concrete steps to end this perpetual injustice," said Bassam Tamimi.

"This is a day of relief, which we hope will blossom into happiness once this brutal military occupation is out of our lives."

The video taken by Nariman Tamimi shows that the soldiers, who were standing on the edge of the family's walled front yard and armed with assault rifles, were able to lightly swat away Ahed Tamimi's slaps and kicks.

"Ahed Tamimi has been released, but only after serving an unjust sentence based on the ridiculous premise that she posed a threat to armed and heavily protected soldiers," said Saleh Higazi.

"The reality is that she was imprisoned in a blatant attempt by the Israeli authorities to intimidate those who dare to challenge the ongoing brutal repression by occupying forces."

The Israeli army prosecutes hundreds of Palestinian children in military courts every year, often after arresting them in night raids and systematically subjecting them to ill-treatment, including blindfolding, threats, harsh interrogations without the presence of their lawyers or families, solitary confinement and in some cases physical violence.

Military courts prosecute Palestinians for violating military orders, many of which criminalize peaceful activities such as peaceful political expression or organizing and attending protests without prior permission from an Israeli military commander.

There are currently some 350 Palestinian children in Israeli prisons and detention centres, according to local human rights organizations.

“While Ahd’s freedom is welcome and long overdue, it must be followed by the release of the other children unlawfully imprisoned by Israeli military courts,” said Saleh Higazi.

Background

Ahd Tamimi confronted the soldiers amid a demonstration in the small village of Nabi Saleh against US President Donald Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The incident took place on the same day that one of Ahd’s cousins, 15-year-old Mohammad Tamimi, sustained serious injuries after he was hit in the head at close range by a rubber bullet fired by an Israeli soldier.

Nabi Saleh, located north-west of Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, has since 2009 been the scene of regular Friday protests against Israeli military occupation, the theft of its land and the loss of the community’s water source.

The Israeli army routinely uses excessive force against protesters and bystanders and has in many cases deliberately damaged private property. Since 2009, three Nabi Saleh residents have been killed by Israeli soldiers, and others have suffered injuries caused by live ammunition, rubber-coated metal bullets and tear gas.

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