

Sde Teiman Prison Israel's Guantanamo

Enforced Disappearance, Rape, and
Torture in the Negev Desert

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Introduction

Since October 7, 2023, the Israeli occupation has escalated its violations of human rights and international law against Palestinian prisoners. Amidst the genocidal assault on the Gaza Strip, a new detention camp known as *Sde Teiman Prison* emerged in the Negev Desert. Situated within an Israeli military base, this prison epitomizes a novel and severe form of repression, where thousands of Palestinians are held in abysmal conditions, isolated from the world and deprived of basic rights. The facility has been dubbed a "new Guantanamo" due to the extreme methods of physical and psychological torture, enforced disappearances, and breaches of fundamental human rights.

This report aims to illuminate the grim reality within *Sde Teiman* and highlight the violations endured by Palestinian detainees, in clear breach of international law.

1. Location

and Crime Scene

Sde Teiman Prison is located on a military base in the Negev Desert, approximately 30 kilometers away from the Gaza Strip, near Beersheba. Established by the Israeli army immediately following the outbreak of the



military offensive on October 7, 2023, the facility is designed to be a site of isolation, cut off from civilian areas.

According to released detainees, human rights activists, and lawyers, the prison lies deep in the desert, in a desolate and uninhabited area disconnected from the outside world.¹

Testimonies suggest that the facility is less like a conventional prison and more akin to a military barracks. The site is packed with military vehicles and equipment, sprawling across a vast area divided into four sections where detainees from Gaza are held. Each section contains four tin tents, each housing

¹ https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/cnn-reports-alleged-abuse-of-palestinian-terror-suspects-in-israeli-detention-facilities/

around 100 prisoners in inhumane conditions, with basic life necessities severely lacking.

Notably, *Sde Teiman* is not recognized as an official detention centre under Israeli law, but rather functions as an extension of the military base.²



The camp has been referred to as the "new Guantanamo" due to the appalling conditions within. Detainees are confined in enclosures resembling chicken coops, exposed to extreme desert heat. Night-lighting is deliberately used as a routine torture technique aimed at causing sleep

deprivation, depression, and other serious disorders for incarcerated individuals. Leaked footage reveals the facility's stark environment and harsh conditions, characterized by high walls, tin roofs, and sandy floors, alongside barbed wire and extensive surveillance systems. Armed guards and armored vehicles patrol the site, with reports of systematic torture against the detainees.³

² <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-08-16/ty-article-magazine/-highlight/we-served-on-israels-sde-teiman-base-heres-what-we-did-to-gazans-detainees/00000191-5591-d60d-a59b-ff994cb40000>

³ <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/7/4/israels-sde-teiman-is-so-similar-to-guantanamo-for-a-reason>

2. Conditions of Captivity

& Enforced Disappearance as a War Crime

The Israeli occupation has engaged in widespread enforced disappearances, primarily targeting Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. These acts constitute a crime under international law, as the occupation forces have concealed the identities and locations of those they abduct, particularly those held in *Sde Teiman*.

Medical personnel, patients, and civilians forcibly displaced under bombardment have been among those targeted in arrest sweeps and enforced disappearance. Upon capture, prisoners have been subjected to inhumane treatment, often led away in handcuffs and blindfolds, without any formal charges or access to legal representation. Detained in secret locations, many of the prisoners have been denied judicial review or the right to contest their detention.



Thousands of Palestinians have been apprehended from shelters, schools, homes, and hospitals where civilians have sought refuge from the relentless aerial and artillery shelling. In an effort to cover up their crimes, Israeli

authorities enacted legal amendments greenlighting the enforced disappearance of detainees.

According to Palestinian lawyers and human rights observers who gained limited access to *Sde Teiman*, there are currently over 1,000 detainees behind the bars of *Sde Teiman*. Official figures from Gaza's government media office estimate the total number of detainees to go far beyond 5,000, with many still unaccounted for. The true scale of detention remains concealed, as the Israeli authorities withhold information and impose gag orders about the prisoners and have transferred many detainees to other undisclosed locations, further obscuring their condition and whereabouts.⁴

This report underscores the urgent need for international intervention to address these gross violations of human rights and international law occurring in *Sde Teiman* and to ensure accountability for the continued unlawful mistreatment of Palestinian detainees.

The list of detainees includes various age groups, among them children, youth, and elderly persons. Detainees have been subject to interrogations while being blindfolded and handcuffed, often enduring prolonged periods of physical and psychological abuse. In addition to this mistreatment, detainees have been systematically denied access to legal assistance, visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and critical medical treatment throughout their confinement.

⁴ <https://www.english.acri.org.il/post/sde-teman-military-detention-facility>

3. Rape

as a Tool of Ethnic Cleansing



Sde Teiman Prison has witnessed egregious sexual violence, including the rape of a Palestinian prisoner by several soldiers, as documented in a leaked video. The

footage, captured by surveillance cameras, depicts the victim lying on the ground, handcuffed and blindfolded, while soldiers and police dogs assault him near barbed wire. The brutality of this crime, clearly visible in the leaked footage, highlights the use of rape as a deliberate tool of ethnic cleansing.⁵

In the aftermath of this horrific incident, calls for an international investigation have intensified. The leaked video, coupled with the reactions from both official and unofficial sources within the occupying state, suggests that this was not an isolated event, but rather part of a broader, systematic policy sanctioned by Israeli officials. Ministers in the occupation government have tacitly cheered on these crimes, reflecting a disturbing pattern of institutionalized violence and state-backed terrorism. Moreover, the video leak appears to be a strategic attempt to divert attention from similar atrocities occurring in other prisons. Despite the frequent occurrence of sexual violence in Israeli detention centres, many incidents go unrecorded, leaving victims without recourse to justice. It is

⁵ <https://theintercept.com/2024/08/09/israel-prison-sde-teiman-palestinian-abuse-torture/>

anticipated that additional evidence and testimonies will soon surface, further exposing the widespread nature of these violations.



Prisoners in *Sde Teiman* are exposed to inhumane conditions, including being bound hand and foot by metal cuffs, as well as torture, abuse, and sexual assault. These degrading practices, along with documented instances of violence, rape, and executions, underscore the ongoing campaign of ethnic extermination waged against the Palestinians in Gaza and other occupied territories.

Rape in armed conflict is considered as one of the most severe crimes, targeting women, men, and even children. It is not merely a physical violation but a strategic weapon of war intended to dismantle social cohesion, erode cultural and community ties, and instill widespread fear and terror.

Article 27 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention explicitly prohibits wartime rape of protected persons in international conflicts. The prohibitions outlined in the 1949 Geneva Conventions were reinforced by the 1977 Additional Protocols I and II to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.⁶

⁶ <https://casebook.icrc.org/highlight/sexual-violence-armed-conflict>

4. Colonial Framework:

The Legal Status of Prisoners

Since the onset of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, Palestinian prisoners transferred to *Sde Teiman* have been blacklisted by the occupation authorities as "unlawful combatants." This designation strips detainees of the rights and protection guaranteed to prisoners of war under the Third Geneva Convention. Such treatment constitutes a gross violation of international law. Many of these individuals have been detained based on erroneous or misleading information, underscoring the arbitrary nature of their captivity.⁷

The "Unlawful Combatants" Law is an unjust legal mechanism employed by Israeli authorities when they are unable to produce evidence against Palestinian detainees. This legislation allows for indefinite detention based on so-called secret evidence, which remains undisclosed to both the detainees and their legal representatives. As a result, prisoners are left vulnerable to prolonged detention without charge or trial, subjected to coercion, exploitation, and psychological manipulation.

The invocation of this law, particularly in the context of Gaza, represents a flagrant violation of the human rights of Palestinian prisoners, who are often held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance. The law permits the isolation of detainees from the outside world indefinitely, in contravention of international human rights standards.

Furthermore, the occupation authorities routinely deny prisoners access to legal assistance and withhold information regarding their condition and whereabouts. Detainees are deprived of fundamental rights, such as the right

⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israels-sde-teiman-prison-restricts-gazan-detainees-freedom/3288954>

to remain silent, which is routinely undermined through physical and psychological torture. The situation is compounded by documented cases of extrajudicial executions within prisons, further implicating Israeli officials and military personnel in war crimes. Under the provisions of the "Unlawful Combatants" Law, soldiers and interrogators are granted immunity from prosecution, perpetuating a culture of impunity and enabling continued violations against detainees.

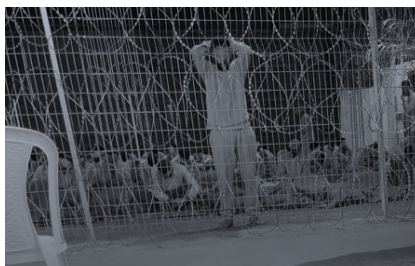
Such measures represent a severe breach of international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, which provides protections for civilians during times of war. Additionally, the "Unlawful Combatants" Law violates fundamental principles of justice and the right to a fair trial, as established under international law. Its implementation underscores the politicization of justice within the Israeli legal system, which serves as a tool to legitimize the ongoing violations of Palestinian prisoners' rights.

5. Testimonies of Atrocities

in Sde Teiman Prison

Prisoners in *Sde Teiman* Prison are subjected to extreme forms of torture, often resulting in severe bleeding and other serious injuries, with no access to medical treatment. The documented violations include sexual assault, deprivation of water, food, and healthcare, and the use of electric wires in torture. Detainees' heads are forcibly submerged in water for extended periods, and they endure

physical violence, including being punched, kicked, and beaten with batons, rifle butts, and metal detectors. Electric shocks are also used during interrogations.⁸ Although not all prisoners undergo formal interrogation, all detainees are subjected to the same brutal torture methods, with no exceptions. Prisoners



range in age from 16 to 60 and endure extremely harsh conditions, including being forced to sleep on the bare floor without blankets or pillows. They are made to sit in rows, handcuffed and blindfolded for extended periods, under the constant supervision of soldiers deployed behind barbed wire. The prisoners are denied the right to stand or sleep as needed, contributing to their physical and psychological deterioration.

In addition to physical torture, psychological torment is widespread. One released prisoner testified that during his interrogation, Israeli intelligence officers forced him to watch footage of bulldozers digging up the graves of his brother and sister, whose bodies were buried in the yard of Kamal Al-Adwan Hospital, and desecrating their remains.⁹

Another former prisoner described the brutal conditions in *Sde Teiman*, noting that detainees are often forbidden to speak or move for extended periods and are stripped of their clothes during freezing nights. In one particularly

⁸ <https://mondoweiss.net/2024/08/nightmare-at-sde-teiman-the-untold-story-of-ibrahim-salem/>

⁹ <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20240804/9851469/infierno-carceles-israel.html>

egregious case, prison guards amputated a detainee's leg after denying him necessary medical care. Many prisoners have suffered similar fates, with amputations becoming a recurring punishment in the absence of adequate healthcare.¹⁰

The atrocities committed by the occupation authorities extend beyond torture and abuse. There have been documented cases of execution and assassination targeting Palestinian prisoners, including those held in *Sde Teiman*. Since October 7, 54 Palestinian prisoners have been pronounced dead, with dozens of these deaths reported in *Sde Teiman*. These figures, however, are unofficial and based on leaks, suggesting the actual death toll is far higher, particularly as reports of Israeli authorities withholding the bodies of hundreds of prisoners continue to emerge.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/05/10/middleeast/israel-sde-teiman-detention-whistleblowers-intl-cmd/index.html>

¹¹ <https://tass.com/world/1806263>

Conclusion and Recommendations

Inhumane Detention Conditions

The conditions in *Sde Teiman* Prison echo the grim realities of history's most notorious detention camps. Prisoners are held in tin tents in the Negev desert under inhumane conditions, deprived of basic necessities such as water, food, and medical care. This prison is yet another facet of the crimes of genocide and military occupation committed against the Palestinian people.

Rape as a Tool of Genocide

The occupation authorities have systematically employed rape and sexual assault as a weapon of genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people. The psychological and social devastation wrought by these crimes is part of a broader effort to erase Palestinian identity and destroy the fabric of Palestinian society.

Enforced Disappearance and Legal Manipulation

Sde Teiman Prison serves as a site for the enforced disappearance of Palestinian prisoners, who are designated as "unlawful combatants" and thus denied the legal protection afforded under the Geneva Conventions. The legal amendments instituted by Israeli authorities facilitate these practices of arbitrary detention and disappearance, in clear contravention of international law. These amendments reflect the occupation's attempt to impose its colonial legal framework over international legal standards, which it continues to violate with impunity.

Systematic Human Rights Violations and Torture

This report documents extensive physical and psychological torture, including sexual violence, beatings, executions, and extortion—actions that constitute war crimes and severe violations of human rights. These atrocities are part of a systematic campaign against Palestinian prisoners, many of whom remain invisible to the outside world.

Strategic Purpose Behind Leaked Footage

The release of video footage from *Sde Teiman* Prison appears to serve as a preplanned distraction from the widespread and recurring crimes committed in other Israeli prisons. The testimonies released by ex-prisoners, coupled with the leaked footage, reveal a systematic and unified torture tactic against Palestinian detainees across all Israeli detention facilities.

Lack of Transparency and Legal Oversight

Israeli authorities refuse to provide any data regarding the conditions and treatment of prisoners. Gag orders further foster impunity, preventing any form of legal or humanitarian accountability.

Impact on Prisoners and Their Families

The heavy psychological and physical toll on prisoners is profound, with many detainees suffering lasting trauma as a result of their prolonged torture and inhumane detention conditions. These effects ripple outward, deeply impacting their families, who are often left in the dark, deprived of any communication or visits.

Absence of Accountability and Investigations

The absence of official and independent investigations or accountability procedures for these ongoing violations only emboldens the continued perpetration of crimes against Palestinian prisoners.

Urgency of International Intervention

The global community must exert pressure on Israeli authorities to comply with international law, ensure the humane treatment of prisoners, and work on their release. Human rights organizations and international legal bodies must take concrete steps to investigate these crimes, hold those responsible accountable, and rescue prisoners from these harrowing conditions before further tension breaks out in the occupied Palestinian territories and the region.

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