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**Pal**estine

# **We Are Palestinians, and We Refuse to Leave Our Homeland**

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV566 - March 2022 -

Publication date: Thursday 24 March 2022

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**The State of Israel has once again imprisoned our comrade Salah Hamouri . Arrested on 7 March at his home, he was then sentenced to a four-month administrative detention sentence - reduced a few days later to three months. The NPA and its candidate Philippe Poutou demand the release of Salah, and we will join all initiatives to this end. [l'Anticapitaliste](#).**

In 2011, I was released from Israeli prison as part of the prisoner exchange that saw the liberation of more than 1,027 Palestinians from Israel's colonial system of punitive imprisonment. Having been incarcerated for nine years, from age nineteen, I was now keen to get on with my life, to study, have a family, to catch up on the years that the occupation authorities had taken from me. Little did I realize, my release was only the start of an ordeal in which I was to become a testing ground for Israel's escalating and ceaseless attacks on Palestinians.

After my release, I traveled to France, my mother's home country, to meet with those who had campaigned tirelessly for my freedom. In France, my imprisonment had become something of a cause célèbre on the Left, and I met numerous public figures and politicians who had spoken out on my behalf. It was there I also met Elsa Lefort, the woman I was to marry and who was to become the mother of my two children. On my return to Palestine, I switched my studies from sociology to law, hoping to become a lawyer and defend those who, like myself, were held prisoner by the Israeli occupation. I began to see how, despite the crushing weight of Israel's brutal colonial regime, I might carve out a life for myself in my home city of al-Quds (Jerusalem).

But Israel had other plans. In 2015, the military commander of the West Bank, Nitzan Alon (trained by the French military), banned me from entering the West Bank from Jerusalem, a move that prevented me from sitting my legal exams. The following year, my pregnant wife was stopped at the airport en route to our family home in Jerusalem, interrogated by Israeli police, and then deported to France. In 2017, I was rearrested and held for thirteen months without trial. In 2020, I was also subject to incarceration for nine weeks before being "conditionally" released on vague terms.

Outside prison, too, the noose has continued to tighten. In 2018, the Israeli parliament passed the "breach of allegiance" law, whose very name attests to its draconian intentions. The law gives the Israeli interior ministry the power to strip Palestinians in Jerusalem of the precarious "residency" status that determines our rights in the city. Since 2020, I have been fighting this attempt to expel me from Jerusalem in the Israeli courts, and now find myself on the verge of deportation in what the International Federation for Human Rights has deemed a concerted campaign of "judicial harassment." This has included me being prevented from traveling to France to see my wife, except for a two-week pass I was given to witness the birth of my second child in April 2021.

Forced From Our Homes

The harassment I've experienced is just one part of a far broader and intensifying concerted effort to weaken and disable Palestinian civil society. Last year, Israel classified some of the best-known Palestinian human rights groups as terrorist organizations, including the prisoner rights organization I work for, Addameer. Their offices have been routinely raided, equipment confiscated, staff arrested, and pressure placed on donors to end their support. At the end of last year, I discovered that my phone had been targeted with Pegasus spyware, and that myself and five other NGO staff were having all their phone data monitored by Israel.

These actions are directed toward one single aim: forcing me to leave Palestine. Since its inception, the Zionist movement has been committed to expelling as many Palestinians as possible from our land. The history books attest to lively debate at Zionist conferences about the best means of encouraging Palestinian departure. In the 1948

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Palestinian Nakba, arguments for "forcible expulsion" decisively won the day, and more than 750,000 Palestinians were forced from their homes.

Ever since, Israel has contrived increasingly intricate methods for inducing us to leave. This is most evident in my home city of Jerusalem, which today lies directly in the crosshairs of Israeli city planners who intend to transform Palestinians into an isolated minority with no rights and no presence. The expulsion of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah highlighted again by the demolition of the Salhiya family home at 5 AM on the coldest day of the year is merely the most well-known incident of ethnic cleansing, with similar initiatives taking place all over the city.

### Refusing to Bow Our Heads

Growing up in Jerusalem amid this extreme injustice compelled me to protest, to find a way to resist. As a child I witnessed house demolitions and arrests, and saw daily the harassment of families by Israeli soldiers at the nearby Israeli checkpoint. Even from a young age I knew that I could not sit by and do nothing, and threw myself into political activism. At age sixteen I was shot in the leg and arrested for five months simply for distributing flyers and being a member of a student union. I was arrested again in 2004 and held for five months under "administrative detention," an old British law that allows for prolonged arrest without trial.

I was again arrested in 2005, accused of attempting to assassinate a far-right Israeli politician, something that Israeli police could not substantiate; no weapons, no plan, and no physical evidence was ever presented, only the testimony of others derived under torture by the Israeli police. Knowing I would likely be sentenced regardless of the merits of the case, I struck a plea bargain for seven years. At the time, I was offered the alternative of fifteen years' exile in France; but knowing Israel's intentions to deport me, I refused.

Everything Israel's apartheid regime has done is aimed at silencing me and encouraging me to give up and leave the country, as they do with any Palestinian who refuses to bow their head and submit to ethnic cleansing. Israeli authorities are creating a bespoke plan of harassment for each politically active person, arresting and harassing them, and where this doesn't work, stripping them of their IDs or health insurance and targeting their family and businesses. They target those that speak out in order to weaken our collective resistance and to more easily expel us.

My own story demonstrates that the Israeli regime is absolutely ruthless, operating with a calculated cruelty that knows no limits. Our family's enforced separation is intended to inflict suffering, to deny my children a father and the experiences and joys of growing up in their homeland with the love of my extended family. Interactions with my children are limited to stolen moments over video call, attempts to forge and maintain a connection despite the distance.

This isn't what I want for my children. But it is better they know that I fought for justice rather than passively accepting ethnic cleansing, better that I do all I can to remain steadfast in our land than acquiesce to Israel's harassment. I am continuing with my struggle because I want all Palestinians to live with freedom and dignity, and I know this will not come without a fight, without sacrifice on the part of those willing to take a stand.

Last year, Palestinians rose in the thousands to defend Jerusalem, sparking an uprising that spread throughout all Palestinian communities in rejection of Israeli colonization. A new generation repeated its commitment to carry forward the struggle for justice, for liberation and for the rights of Palestinian refugees living for decades in exile. As our people have not given up, neither can I, and neither can the millions around the world who support Palestine, and whose commitment to our cause is more important now than ever before.

6 March 2022

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Source [Jacobin](#).

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