



PALESTINE HUMAN RIGHTS BULLETIN

NUMBER 1

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This issue of the Palestine Human Rights Bulletin publishes reports (received by us in the first half of this year) written by two Israeli attorneys active in the defence of Palestinian political prisoners. They are concerned with detailing the circumstances that led the Palestinian prisoners in Askelon Prison to begin a mass hunger strike on December 10, 1976.

This strike took place in two stages -- the first lasting 45 days -- making it the longest mass hunger strike of its kind.

In addition to describing the feelings and situation of the prisoners during and after the strike, the reports of these two Israeli attorneys describe in detail the conditions that existed in the prison prior to the strike and the insensitivity of the Israeli authorities to take any steps to remedy these conditions -- it was this intransigence that is noted as the cause of the strike.

After 45 days, bending to international pressure, the authorities agreed to make some improvements in the prison and the strike was temporarily suspended.

After it became clear that the Israeli's had no intention to make any of the changes they had agreed to, the strike was renewed on February 26, 1977. After severe massive repression, the second strike was ended after about one month. Today the conditions at Askelon remain virtually unimproved.

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The conditions in Askelon and other Israeli prisons have been repeatedly condemned by several international organizations including the International Committee of the Red Cross (I.C.R.C.) and Amnesty International (A.I.). On February 13, after repeated appeals had been made on behalf of the prisoners by the I.C.R.C. and A.I., the United Nations Human Rights Commission condemned Israel for refusal to provide humane conditions for its prisoners (it also found the Israeli prison authorities responsible for the death of a number of Arab detainees). The U.N. resolution of condemnation was 22-3 (with 5 abstentions). Only the U.S., Costa Rica and Canada voted against the resolution.

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THE STRIKE IN ASKELON PRISON I by Felicia Langer

This first report came to us from Felicia Langer. In it she describes the strike and the treatment given to her client Muhammad Mehdi Bassiso, one of the leaders of the strike.

For some ten years now I represent Arab prisoners in the jails of the conquering regime, and among them prisoners of Ashkelon Jail. This prison which was known for years as a specially tough prison, had also known numerous struggles by the prisoners who have refused to submit to the specially hard conditions of imprisonment imposed on them and who had to suffer in return the hard attitude of their jailers in which petty wishes of revenge and hate were intermixed. Long

hunger strikes, and a rebellion which was only crushed by bloodshed has testified to the determination of the Ashkelon prisoners to live as human beings. In the year 1977, we have witnessed two long hunger strikes by Ashkelon Jail prisoners, last of which ended in March. I could follow the two strikes, since I am the attorney of one of the strike leaders -- one among the four members of the strike committee, Muhammad Mehdi Bassiso. That courageous man was taken away and hidden

away in the middle of the first strike. I was not allowed to see him, and only after a special appeal to the Supreme Court, and after the judges had defined that refusal as a scandal and an anti-democratic act, I was allowed to see him. When I did see him at last, it was as if a skeleton appeared before my eyes, not a human being; for during the strike he had lost more than 20 Kg. (44.5 lb.) of his weight. He was then able to tell me how, during the hunger strike, the prisoners were compelled to lie all the time on the cold floor (in the midst of the winter) and after a period of time, 59 prisoners considered to be the chief "trouble-makers" were taken-off, handcuffed, to other prisons. Those who were considered as the leaders in this group, were chained, in addition, to one another by their hands and feet; so tight that they could not move at all.

In that condition, the group in which Bassiso was present, was taken to an open truck to Kefar-Yonah Jail. On the way they were beaten-up by their escort, and on arrival in Kefar-Yonah Jail they got another beating. Jewish prisoners were brought-up into their cells and ordered to eat before their faces, in order to make the hunger-strike more difficult, and they remained chained to each other -- although not so tight as on their way -- by day and night continuously. This fact, made the sleep very difficult. Also they were forbidden to wash, to walk in the prison courtyard or to read a newspaper. Then they were forced, but not by medically trained personnel, but by ordinary prison-wardens, who have caused wounds to many of them during the putting-in of the tube into the oesophagus. The demands of the hunger-strikers are known from the previous publications of the League for Human and Civil Rights. I have been told by Mr. Bassiso, whom I represent, that the hunger-strike was only ended after the prisoners received a promise from the prison administration, that it shall conduct talks with them about their demands. He finished by saying: "You looked shocked when you see me alone. Those sixty men who hunger-struck with me all the time, look exactly as I do."

I have succeeded to see Mr. Bassiso once again on 14.2.1977, being accompanied by my attorney-in-training Mr. Abed El-Asali. On that occasion, Mr. Bassiso has told me bitterly that the prison administration has deceived the hunger-strikers and that the governor had refused to talk with the prisoners-committee and that the only "success" obtained by the strike was the addition of tooth-brushes and almonds to the list of the products the prisoners are allowed to buy in the prison canteens. He also told me that the prison-administration persecuted the hunger-strike leaders, and that the prisoners have reached the conclusion that they should reopen their hunger-strike again. On another visit, on 23.3.1977,

Mr. Bassiso asked me to announce to all men of conscience, in Israel or in the conquered territories that next-day the prisoners of Ashkelon Jail will reopen the hunger-strike, because of their rapidly worsening conditions. On the next visit, on 2.3.1977, we had perceived that Mr. Bassiso has weakened considerably, but he told us that the other hunger-strikers and he are firm in their decision. "We have no political demands" he said, "We do not ask to be recognized as war-prisoners. We only ask, that our conditions should be equal to those of the Jewish criminal prisoners, for example, that we should be allowed also to sleep on beds and not on the cold floor, or on the half-centimeter thin rubber mattress put on that floor. We ask for more hours of walk in the courtyard; we ask not to be packed 22 hours out of 24, in hermetically closed cells, being packed, 20 prisoners and more into a cell whose whole size is sometimes no more than 4 X 4 meters. We ask for more food, for the same rights of visiting like the Jewish prisoners, without a limitation of the right of visit to the nearest family relations. We ask for a minimal medical care, for the right of obtaining reading material we want to read, and we specially emphasize that we include in this Marxist literature which is forbidden to us. Is our demand to give us the same rights, like the Jewish prisoners, so extraordinary?"

He then told me, how after the strike had begun, some 150 armed Border-Guards were introduced into the prison to overawe the hunger-strikers. Mr. Bassiso and three other hunger-strike leaders were then taken away from their cells and put into a punishment cell, a completely closed one for 24 hours. Nevertheless 215 prisoners hunger-struck and some 200 more (weak from the former strike) refused to work. After some time, the prison authorities attempted to break it by separating the hunger-strikers, 55 of them were transferred to Kefar-Yona Jail, 37 to Abu-Kabir (near Tel-Aviv) prison, and 60 to Jalame (near Haifa). On 13.3.1977 a demonstration, arranged by the Israel League for Human and Civil Rights, and by the Israeli Democratic Attorney's Association, was held before the Ashkelon Jail. The governor of the prison refused to speak with a delegation of the demonstrators. I had then asked to see Mr. Bassiso, but I had been refused. The prison authorities claimed that he is not in that prison, and that I should have announced to them my visit at least 48 hours before.

On 17.3.1977, I had met in Ashkelon Jail with Mr. Bassiso, together with my attorney-in-training Mr. Abed El-Asali. Mr. Bassiso told us, speaking with a weak voice, that he was brought only a short time before for the meeting from a place unknown to him, where he was kept for 15 days together with his comrade, also a member of the strikers-committee Mr. Jaber Amar. He could only say that they were both held all that time in a

completely closed room, with electrical light turned on day and night. They were forbidden to go out from that room even for W.C. One, in a bad condition was provided inside that cell, broken. During that whole time, they were not allowed to wash, to change their clothes or to wash them. They were not given towels or even toilet paper. Their demands for a medical treatment or inspection were denied, although Mr. Bassiso is an ill man, and suffers from an ulcer. Mr. Bassiso told us that he felt that the authorities have tried in this way to cause his death indirectly, so it could not be said that they have actually killed him. The prison-wardens who were present during this talk, told Mr. Bassiso that the hunger-strike has ended, but Mr. Bassiso told them, that if this is true, let them allow him to meet even one of those who had struck previously and now do it, and he will also, then, break his hunger-strike. The wardens have refused to do this, and Mr. Bassiso refused to break his hunger strike, saying that they do not speak the truth.

In order to safeguard his basic conditions which will not endanger his life I have submitted at the same day a petition to the Supreme Court in which I have asked the court to order the Prison Superintendent not to persecute Mr. Bassiso, and claiming that the actions of the Prison-Superintendent are violations of the law. I have also claimed in the name of Mr. Bassiso that the Prison Superintendent is trying to bring about his death indirectly. On 18.3.1977, the Supreme Judge B.Z. Shareshevski has issued an order nissi, asking the Prison Superintendent to show cause within 20 days why he should not assure to Mr. Bassiso adequate conditions, and why I should not be notified about where exactly he is imprisoned.

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NOTE: On June 15, the day she sent us this report, Ms. Langer enclosed the following note:

P.S. I have seen M. B. in prison on 27.5.77 after he has stopped his hunger strike. He was transferred there, together with his comrade from the striker's committee, Jaber Amar. He has recovered some of his weight, but he suffers severely now from ulcer and allergic skin disease. My request to bring to him a doctor from outside the prison (because of his complaints that he is not treated) was rejected. His detention conditions are bad, and nothing was improved after the strike.

Some days ago my practitioner visited Ashkelon prison. The prisoners said to him, that they feel deceived, that no improvement is observed in their situation and that they will not hesitate to wage another struggle for humane conditions.

F. Langer
15.6.77

* * *

On 1.4.1977, I went together with Mr. Bassiso's immediate family to Shatta-Jail, for I was notified that he is there. After we have reached that far-away place, and after we have waited, we were told that he was taken to the Ramleh-Jail hospital. We went as quickly as possible to Ramleh-Jail, and after many requests, we had succeeded to see him (it was an eve of a holiday). He looked really like a skeleton, or like those pictures of people dying of hunger in the concentration camps. Only the old flame in his eyes remained and the fighting spirit. We asked him to cease his hunger strike and we told him that this is also the demand of his comrades but he refused saying: "Only when I will know that they have really decided so, I will agree. Otherwise I will not betray my comrades."

When I am writing this, I hear still in my ears what Mr. Bassiso told me that day -- me and the prison-wardens who were present: "We do not want to conduct a war with the wardens, or to demand something excessive. All what we want is bread and sun."

And those are really the basic demands of the Ashkelon-prisoners. Bread and sun. Things which should not be taken away from any man whatsoever.

Would the ears of the men of conscience be closed for such a human request?

THE STRIKE IN ASHKELON PRISON II
by Leah Tsemel

These next reports were received by us over a 4 month period in the beginning of this year. They are from Leah Tsemel, who represents a number of the inmates in Ashkelon.

REPORT #1

JANUARY 1, 1977

On the 28.12.76 I visited my client, Nadim Hamed Darwish, at the Ashkelon jail.

On the 20.1.77 I visited by client, Abdoul Aziz Ali Shahin, in the Kfar Yona jail, to which he had been transferred from Ashkelon on the 32nd day of the hunger strike.

My two clients asked me to deal with the problems that caused them and the other prisoners of Ashkelon jail to begin their hunger strike, and to request assistance from any group or individual interested in their cause.

They informed me of the following:

The prisoners' sent petitions to the prison board and to the relevant authorities asking for improvement of their conditions. After these were ordered dismissed by the director of the Ashkelon jail, Mr. Distenfeld, and ignored by the authorities, the prisoners felt they had no other choice and went on strike.

All the 386 Arab prisoners of the jail began the strike on the 11th December, 1976. They chose this method rather than any other in order to demonstrate that they had no wish to harm any person, and because the only moral way to express their protest and to ensure presentation of their demands was to bring injury to themselves - to starve their bodies until their demands were fulfilled.

What were the prisoners' complaints?

The Ashkelon prisoners' struggle was not directed toward political recognition of their status as prisoners of war, but only to reach equalization of their condition with that of the criminal prisoners.

Knowing the miserable conditions of the criminal prisoners in Israel, one can understand how bad those of the strikers are.

For the past 10 years the Arab prisoners in Ashkelon jail have been sleeping with neither bed nor mattress, in dark and damp cells. As a result of Red Cross intervention, a few of the prisoners recently received a few strips of thin foam mattress, but this is not sufficient to isolate the extreme cold of the concrete floor. The others must do with a few blankets. The prisoners do not receive any linen during their sentence.

The prisoners do not receive clothes from the prison authorities and aside from the 2 meagre outfits they receive on admission to jail, they have no other articles. Their underwear is brought by their families once a year.

The Arab prisoners of Ashkelon jail do not work since the only work offered was to sew camouflage nets for the IDF. They are locked in the cells for 23 hours a day. The 24th hour is a parade in a desolate closed square. In each cell 20-30 prisoners are contained in conditions of extreme overcrowding; they must eat, defecate, study and play in this cell. The stench is overpowering. Requests for a proper dining room and a recreation hall have been turned down. The cells are not lighted during the day and lack fresh air. And the windows overlook a blocked corridor. The lights at night are turned off at 9:30 p.m. The prisoners' requests that they should be kept on until 10:00 p.m. were turned down.

The prisoners have complained repeatedly about the quality of the food. They have stated that the deputy director of the jail, and the officer in charge of security are profiting rations. The food that is served is poor and monotonous and does not contain nutrients. It is mostly fats, potatoes and overboiled beans, which are harmful to the health of most of the prisoners who suffer from ulcers. They complain of constant hunger. In the past, prisoners' families were permitted to bring fruits and sweets but this was abolished 2 years ago.

In the past, the prisoners had access to the dried fruits sold at the canteen, but are now allowed to buy cigarettes and tea only. The families used to be able to bring up to IL30 a month, but this has been reduced to IL20. The Jewish prisoners are allowed to receive IL70 a month. When the Arab prisoners brought this up before the director, his reply was "I am free to do as I will, you may strike if you wish".

The Ashkelon prisoners are not permitted to register in academic studies by correspondence although in all other prisons within the green lines this is allowed. No reason is given for this. Also, they are not permitted to receive any political, economic or sociological literature despite a supreme court order that the prisoners may receive any book that is sold in the country. The only newspaper they get is

"El Anba" (Arabic) and infrequently - the "Jerusalem Post. "El Anba" is a government paper and deals mostly with interior matters.

The prisoners have strong complaints about the medical treatment in the jail. They state that the M.D. sees some 50 prisoners in a 15 min. period and the treatment is in accordance with the limited time spent with the patient. The prisoners recall the tale that in order to check the attention paid by the doctor one prisoner complained that his button ached. The doctor wrote out a prescription for Aspirins. For a complaint of 'conscience pains' the doctor prescribed APC. The same was given for baldness.

Almost all the prisoners suffer from ulcers and all suffer from rheumatic pains. Amongst them there are prisoners who have been disabled by intensive interrogation processes. They do not receive medical treatment for their ailments. For the past 10 months they have been asking to see an eye specialist. A dentist who visits the prison irregularly and infrequently is not prepared to spend time on curative measures and is only willing to remove teeth. The prisoners have offered to pay for operations for their fellow inmates but the board refused and the operations were not performed. Prisoners who have ear trouble - even in cases of acute infection - have been refused treatment. Many of the prisoners have hemorrhages which are neglected. A proposal that one of the prisoners act as medical aid to the doctor was dismissed.

Amongst the prisoners there are men who are paralyzed, blind and a few who are mentally unbalanced as a result of the interrogations. But they receive no care.

The following may be an example of what happens in the Ashkelon jail:

The prisoners state: A prisoner by the name of Omar Shalaby from Syria, aged 23 or 24, had a nervous breakdown while in the jail laundry and threw around 5 irons. The director, Mr. Distenfeld, hit Mr. Omar with a club. Mr. Omar was taken to the hospital at the Ramla jail and passed away soon after. The deputy director responded to the incident by suggesting that "they should be killed on the spot. The cost of transporting the corpse from the jail to the pathological institute is only IL80".

As noted, when the strike broke out it included all the prisoners. After the 5th day, the organizers of the strike instructed that each prisoner would be free to break the strike when he wished, but for many days all the men continued to refuse food.

On the 32nd day 59 prisoners, who were apparently considered to be the organizers

of the strike, were transferred to the Kfar Yona jail. 2 of them were later taken to Shata jail. They are Muhammad Mehdi Bassaro and Jaaber Amar. As of today, the 41st day of the strike, 55 prisoners from Ashkelon are on hunger strike in Kfar Yona, and until the 40th day, the 2 prisoners in Shata were on strike. Other prisoners have been dispersed among the prisons and yet it is estimated that some 150 are still refraining from food.

The Ashkelon prison has been emptied of almost all its inmates and the authorities have thus been able to declare to the papers (19.1.77) that 'after 35 days - the strike in Ashkelon is over'. There is simply no one left to strike at Ashkelon, but in the jails of their 'exile' the prisoners are determined to continue to starve until their demands are fulfilled.

From the beginning, the prisoners refused to eat or to be fed. On the 8th day, they were force-fed and this has continued. The prisoners refused to drink the 400cc of milk presented to them and have subsequently been forced to accept the liquid by means of a tube that is pushed into the stomach through the nose or mouth. The normal milk intake in the prison is 1 litre a day per person.

The conditions of the prisoners transferred to Kfar Yona is even worse than it was in Ashkelon. They have been housed in the 'D Wing' which was declared, over 4 years ago, by Dr. Meir and a special committee, to be 'unfit for human habitation'. In this wing, the prisoners are kept in 3 airless and insect-ridden rooms. They have received a few blankets, no change of clothes, no reading material and no daily exercise. Some of the prisoners, my client states, have lost over 30kg of weight since the inception of the strike and cannot tolerate the cold any more, but when they applied to Dr. Goldwasser for an additional blanket for one of the prisoners who was in a bad way, the doctor replied 'first end your strike'.

The prisoners have had a few visitors to the jail: First they saw a committee composed of Mr. Givati, Mr. Gurgeman and Mrs. Hemda Fenigar - all of the prison authorities. These persons heard their complaints but nothing came of it. Later, the board allowed a delegation from Gaza, including a lawyer, to meet with the strikers. A member of Knesset from the opposition, Mr. Ben Zion Keshet, was allowed to see them and recently they were visited by the governor of the prison authorities, Mr. Levi. He had one thing to say to them: 'End the strike and then we will talk.'

On the other hand, the lawyers of some of the prisoners were not permitted to meet

with their clients. It would appear that this was ordered by the governor himself. I had to appeal to the Supreme Court against the director of the Ashkelon prison and the governor of the prison authorities, since I was not able to meet with my clients when I visited them on the 22.12.76. The honourable Judge Etzioni of the Supreme Court issued a decision which ordered that I be permitted immediate access to my clients. When I arrived at the prison with the court order, the director allowed me to see only one of my 2 clients, whose appeal was to be heard the next day. I had to go a second time to the Supreme Court for judgement against the director of the prison and governor of the prison authorities. The honourable Judge Vitkon pronounced that

the court order had been disobeyed and I received a IL100 compensation for expenses. Only after this prolonged process was I able to interview my clients.

A similar situation was faced the attorney Felicia Langer. She represented a plea to the Supreme Court and the court ordered that the prisoner be presented before it at an early date. The president of the court on that occasion, the honourable Judge Cohen, commented that the affair is a scandal.

My client states that he and other prisoners wrote to their lawyers requesting them to visit the jail during the strike, but the prison authorities refused to handle the mail until the prisoners terminated their strike.

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REPORT #2

FEBRUARY 2, 1977

After 45 days of a complete hunger strike (11.12.76-25.1.77), the prisoners of Ashkelon jail stopped the strike. Most of the prisoners were on strike up to 35 days and a group of 56 prisoners, who were transferred on the 32nd day of the strike to Kefar Yona jail, continued the strike up to the 45th day.

The prisoners' consent to stop the strike was attained in the following way:

A number of prisoners from Kefar Yona jail were summoned to meet with the director of the jail, Mr. Segal, on the 44th day of the strike. However, they refused to talk to him and asked that the elected committee of the prisoners of Ashkelon jail would represent them. They demanded that two of their comrades, who had been transferred from Ashkelon jail to Shata jail would be brought to Kefar Yona jail and would join the other members of the committee.

And within two hours Muhammad Mehdi Bassiso and Jaaber Amar were brought from Shata jail. Mr. Segal, the director of Kefar Yona jail, told the committee that he had talked with the governor, Mr. David Levi, and that the latter intended to deal with the prisoners' demand with a positive approach. However, he added that Mr. Levi would not meet with them as long as the strike would continue.

He added that according to his impression, the prisoners of Ashkelon went on strike because of the fact that the governor, Mr. Levi, had formerly been the chief commander of the border guard. The prisoners made it clear, again, that they only demanded human conditions and equalization of their condition with that of the criminal prisoners, and that as far as they were concerned there was no difference if

Mr. Levi was persecuting them while they were active militants or while being prisoners.

The committee refused to break the strike as long as Mr. Levi did not appear before the committee. Mr. Segal had telephoned Mr. Levi and told the committee that Mr. Levi was discussing the strike in Ashkelon jail and wished to solve the matter positively, and that he was also told by telephone that within a week a delegation on behalf of the Prisoners' Services would come to Ashkelon jail and that Mr. Levi would appear in person in the jail in order to talk with the committee which would present the prisoners' complaints and that everything possible would be done for the prisoners, even beyond their demands.

After such a firm promise the committee decided to moderate the hunger strike. Thus, they started to eat on the 25th of January 1977.

All the prisoners were transferred back to Ashkelon jail, expecting the delegation to come the same week. However, up to the second of February 1977, neither the expected delegation nor Mr. Levi appeared in the jail.

The prisoners complain that they still do not know what has happened to two of their comrades who did not return to Ashkelon jail. The two are:

Muhammed Abu Hamid
Muhammed Mduh

The prisoners also complain about the measures taken against them during the strike:

Muhammad Mehdi Bassiso (the prisoner in regard to whom the attorney at law Felicia

Langer presented a plea to the Supreme Court since she was not permitted to meet with him) was severely beaten in Shata jail and put in the "hole". That was done while he was extremely weak after 32 days of hunger strike.

In Ashkelon jail the gaolers revealed their cruelty when Mu'in Abu Zed, a Palestinian refugee from Lebanon, asked a gaoler to call an aid-man for a comrade on strike in the cell, whose condition had become aggravated. The gaoler stated that "there is time" and that there was no need to call an aid-man urgently. Mu'in insisted and as a consequence of that, the counting officer was brought. Mu'in had been taken out of his cell, sprayed with tear-gas, his mouth was shut (in order that other prisoners will not wake up from the cries) was beaten all over his body and was put in a hole.

The prisoners argue that the food they were given after the strike ended was intentionally designed to cause them physical problems. On the first day after the strike they received cowpeas which caused them stomach pains for a number of days and aggravated the haemorrhoids from which most of them suffer. The prisoners' request to receive medicine to regulate their defecation was refused and there are prisoners who still have not had defecation (3.2.77).

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REPORT #3

MARCH 1, 1977

On the 27th February 1977 I visited my clients at the Ashkelon jail who asked me to act on their behalf in the following manner:

Some two weeks ago a delegation of the Israel Prison Authority visited the Ashkelon jail and spoke with some of the prisoners. After the prisoners detailed their complaints and demands for rectifying the horrible prison conditions at Ashkelon, the said delegation, headed by Mr. Haim Levi, Israel Prison Commissioner, agreed to implement the following improvements:

1. Every prisoner will be entitled to acquire a hair-brush.
2. Every prisoner will be allowed to purchase, privately at the prison's canteen, almond and turkish delight out of the monthly allowance of IL30 (\$3) which they are allowed to receive from their families (a Jewish prisoner is allowed IL70 per month).

The majority of the prisoners are extremely weak. Their bones stick out, and they say that every prisoner is requested to undress in the toilet in order to prevent his comrades from suffering as they see him.

The prisoners are very doubtful about the governor's promise to grant them their demands or even to meet with them. However, they do not intend to stop their struggle and they say that means of struggle are still open to them even if they pay for it with their lives.

One prisoner with whom I talked, told me the following:

"I was a frogman for many years. Most of the time I was under the water and in hard training and I was healthy. Six months in Ashkelon jail made me a sick and weak person who suffers from pains all over his body.

"Had I known in advance what was the Israeli jail like, I would not have let myself be arrested. I would have fought to death when they came to capture me, since death is better than life in Ashkelon jail".

Another prisoner said: "If they do not let us live like human beings, we will die like human beings".

The prisoners were told that if a new wing should be built at the Ashkelon jail, it may be possible to solve the problem of overcrowdedness in the prison cells.

Naturally, the prisoners considered these suggestions by the said delegation as a joke and an insult especially since these recommendations do not at all relate to their key demands of equalizing their prison conditions to those of the Jewish criminal prisoners.

On the 24th February 1977 the Ashkelon prisoners renewed their hunger strike and today some 215 prisoners are again on strike. Their health is very poor and fragile due to their previous hunger strike, which ended only 1 month ago, but they are determined to continue the strike until their demands are met. This time they are unlikely to be misled by bogus promises.

MAY 2, 1977

On 16.3.77 I visited Abed-Elaziz Ali Shahin, a hunger striker at Ashkelon Prison, who because of his critical physical condition was hospitalized at Ramle Prison.

On 28.3.77 sixty-two prisoners from Ashkelon were transferred to Jalme Prison in East Haifa, and shortly afterwards eighty two striking prisoners were transferred to the prison at Kfar Yona.

Abed Elaziz Shahin was held in isolation at Jalme Prison for about 5 days; Mr. Distenfeld, the administrator of Ashkelon Prison came to talk with the prisoners at Jalme Prison on 5.3.77 and on the following day Mr. Chaim Levy, the commissioner of the prison authorities came as well. In the conversation he held with Shahin, he assured him that he will consider in a positive light initiating improvements and that all the prisoners' demands that are not contrary to law will be met.

Shahin, who was transferred to Ramle Prison due to the deterioration of his physical condition, states that he is well treated at the hospital and that the doctors and staff attend and spoil him. There is no doubt that everything is done in order to keep him alive, despite his frail health, and to prevent him from becoming a victim of the hunger strike.

On 15.3.77, the eighty two prisoners at Kfar Yona terminated their hunger strike, and to the best of our knowledge the rest of the prisoners terminated their strike on 16.3.77.

The strike was discontinued after several small but significant improvements were awarded, and the possibility of further improvements were considered.

The following list includes both the given improvements and those promised in the future.

1. A prisoner is able to see an Arab doctor within a week of submitting his request.
2. Prisoners will receive mattresses.

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This Palestine Human Rights Bulletin is issued by the Palestine Human Rights Campaign (P.H.R.C.). Since Israel's continued violations against Palestinian human rights receive little or no attention in the United States, the P.H.R.C. was formed in May of 1977 to:

1. Promote the investigation, publication and understanding of these incidents of human rights violations,
2. Lend support to the victims and their attorneys,
3. Secure the enforcement of existing internationally recognized norms of human rights and fundamental freedoms for the Palestinian people.

For information or to make a contribution write to:

Palestine Human Rights Campaign
Walnut Bottom, Pennsylvania 17266

3. Prisoners will be allotted 4 Kg. of fruits per month via the Red Cross.
4. The prisoners' families will be allowed to bring them winter and summer clothes.
5. A greater variety of goods will be made available for purchase at the canteen.
6. The prisoners will receive one Arab newspaper.
7. The prisoner's canteen allowance will be increased.
8. There will be some opportunity for the prisoners to supervise their food.
9. Considerations will be made to vary the meals, and to include eastern cooking in the future.
10. The possibility (not certain) of enabling prisoners to take correspondence courses at a university.
11. The possibility (not certain) of allowing deliverance of all books published in Israel (with the exception of Communist publications).
12. The adjunction of an Arab prisoner to the medical staff.

Three prisoners who are considered the leaders of the hunger strike, among them Muhammad Mehdi Bassiso, did not hear of these commitments and continued their strike, also while at the Ramle prison hospital, until 4.4.77.

I again visited Ashkelon prison on 22.4.77. I deduced from conversations with the prisoners that the realization of these promises has not begun to be seriously carried out. The only improvements felt thusfar are: a small increase of bread at meals, additional choices of products at the canteen, and a raise of 10IL (\$1) in the amount of money allowed for deposit in the prisoner's account each month.

The prisoners are quite worried by the fact that those prisoners who are considered the strike leaders have not yet been returned to Ashkelon Prison and that the four of them are still dispersed between Shita Prison and the prison at Kfar Yona.