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Date: 18 April 2013

## Treatment of families attending court cases of their teenage sons

**Date of incidents:** 18 April 2013

**Place:** Salem Military Court

**Witnesses:** IWPS, EAPPI, Anarchists Against the Wall, Palestinian families

*Note: IWPS withholds contact information as a courtesy to those involved. However, we will do our best to furnish you with the information you may require, upon request.*

### **Description of incidents:**

At 7:40 on Thursday 18 April, IWPS arrived at Salem Military Court, where a crowd of about 40 family members were waiting outside the high barbed-wire fencing, gates and watch-tower. A shed-like structure provided some shelter, with some benches and a few plastic chairs which were wet from the night's rain. A water fountain was provided, but no toilet facilities. A solitary stall selling coffee and refreshments was being run from a van nearby, where personal possessions could also be deposited for a small fee, as no electronics are allowed inside the court.

At about 8:00, an army jeep arrived behind the fence, and some soldiers arrived to man the first checkpoint. When the gate was opened, a soldier came out with a list of the names to be allowed priority entrance. The first few family members, upon inspection of their IDs, were then allowed entrance through the first turnstile, and proceeded to a white door, through which they disappeared slowly, two at a time.

Gradually, as more people arrived, a considerable crowd was building at the first gate. A maximum of two family members were allowed for each hearing. Families are not given an appointment for these court-cases, so with every passing minute comes the worry that they may miss the chance to attend the hearing (See HRR 458). An Israeli official shouted for order, after which a more orderly line was formed. At one point, the vehicular gates opened, and an army jeep passed through, en route to military training. Minutes later, gun shots were heard from the adjoining land.

After passing the first turnstile is a small yard with a crowd of about 30 people, all waiting to pass through a white door. The orderly queues of the early morning had disintegrated, and everyone focused on getting through the white door as soon as possible. Gun shots were again heard from the Palestinian land adjoining the court.

Through the next door everyone is asked to remove any metal objects while their ID cards are examined; then they must walk along an open-air path for about 100 metres, enclosed all the way by barbed-wire fencing on every side.

This leads to another building with a waiting room and toilet facilities which are in dire need of cleaning. About 20 people were crowding to get through the next metal detector and another turnstile. Following the next turnstile is a desk, where IDs, car keys and mobile phones are taken by Israeli soldiers; visitors then enter a small room separately for a full body search with a soldier of the same sex.

After all these procedures, a door leading to the main waiting area opens. At the time of IWPS visit, the yard contained a drinking fountain and 2 toilet cubicles, a single pedestrian-width gate which led to the courtrooms and a pre-fabricated building with seats. In this area, families wait without reading materials, food, tea or coffee facilities. Some attend hearings and leave by 10:00 or 11:00, others are there until court closes at 16:00.

People crowd around the single gate, through which the names of the defendants for the next court case are shouted. Those sitting in the waiting room were relying on the fact that someone would alert them if it was their child's case, as they would not hear the name otherwise. Many crowding around the gate were trying to catch glimpses of the defendants on their way to and from the courtrooms. At one point, an army soldier took it upon herself to move everybody back from the gate to an arbitrary point in the yard.

A mother waiting to attend a hearing reported to IWPS that she had become separated from her older son on the way through all the security measures. EAPPI and Anarchists Against the Wall were there to attend several cases from a different village. IWPS was also allowed admission to these cases; everyone was led into benches in a courtroom. At the top of the courtroom was the judge's desk. To the right, there was a stall into which the prisoners were led. At right angles to the judge's desk were three more desks: for the lawyers, army scribes, and army personnel.

In all cases, the parents were led to the bench in the far left of the room, the one furthest away from their imprisoned children. A metal guard-rail separated the officials from the public area, where we sat. The door was guarded by 3-4 police officers who constantly wandered in and out.

The first court cases witnessed by IWPS went quickly: most did not last more than 10 minutes. Prisoners, all of them teenage boys, were led to a stall handcuffed and shackled, wearing brown prison uniforms. Handcuffs were removed for the duration of the court case. The proceedings were conducted in Hebrew and translated into Arabic. It seemed that the majority of cases were being postponed. From the position of the families at the far end of the court room, they could do little but look at their sons, and communicate with a few hand gestures. In one case, while parents were trying to mouth a message to their son, they were told by a police guard to stop.

After each court case, the family members are allowed one minute to talk to their sons. They do this from behind the guard-rail set at a right angle to where their sons stood. In each case, the police guard would point to where the family can stand, which was 2 metres diagonally away from their son. If the parents came closer to their child, they were ushered back. No physical contact was possible, the conversation was usually abruptly ended with “Khalas, khalas” [*Enough, enough* in Arabic] from the soldier. The son would then be handcuffed and led out of the court, while the parents were led out another door in the opposite direction, sometimes getting a glimpse of their son behind them.

In one case, a father sat tearfully through the whole case, and refused the 1-minute opportunity to talk to his son at the end. After the court case, this man was seen sitting dejectedly on the ground in the waiting area. IWPS was informed by EAPPI that his wife had died about two weeks previously and his imprisoned teenage son was unable to attend the funeral.

In the next hearing IWPS attended, a mother and brother initially sat on the central bench of the court room, but were ushered over to the far-left bench. The mother tried to explain to the guard that she had difficulty hearing, but was still directed to the far-left bench, despite the central ones lying empty.

Eight Israeli soldiers and police were present. Several were playing with their mobile phones. The soldier who was translating from Hebrew to Arabic did so casually, and only within the earshot of the imprisoned boy. The family were unable to hear this translation. The mother signaled him that she could not hear, but was ignored.

There were many interruptions to the case: doors were banging on both the left and the right sides of the room; police and army personnel were constantly coming in and out. The mother's view of her son was regularly obscured by lawyers and the army. At one point, the soldier who was translating to Arabic left the room to answer a phone call.

When the mother got the chance to talk to her son, there were conversations going on in close proximity all around her, thus she struggled to communicate across the 2-meter distance. Her son's case was deferred for another four days, meaning that two members of her family would have to go through the same journey again later in the week.

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