

Update from the Holy Land

October 2016

"People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them."

Mark 10:13-16



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"I feel like a target":

Palestinian teenager relates experience of
arrest and detention



Hamseh; all photo credits in this article to Katie Archibald-Woodward*

“We woke up to the sound of the banging and breaking of doors. It was 2 a.m. I rushed to the door in my pajamas. All my children woke up crying,”

Hamzeh's father Amer is telling us a story. In the middle of the night on January 11, 2016, Israeli soldiers raided the family's home, their faces painted and accompanied by army dogs. They asked for Hamzeh, the family's 16-year-old son. A soldier told Amer, "I want Hamzeh for only five minutes. Bring him to me." His parents asked why they wanted him, pleading that he was a minor. They received no answer. The soldiers took Hamzeh, blindfolding him and tying his hands behind his back. They didn't allow him to tell the family goodbye. "We were worried about his fate," Amer said. "We were given no documents at all; we didn't know where they were taking him, for how long, or what the charge was against him."

I am sitting in the family's living room, already surrounded by offerings of juice and coffee. The long sofas lining the walls are full of family members- parents, cousins, aunt, brothers, grandmother, and eventually the 2-year-old sister who woke from her nap. I have been invited here by Gerard Horton and Salwa Duaibis of Military Court Watch, a volunteer advocacy organization focused on the issue of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention.



(Hamzeh sits between his grandmother and his cousin)

We are in a village near Bethlehem known for its stone quarries as well as the high incidence of respiratory diseases. The air outside the windows is chalky. On

our drive to the village, we had passed a temporary military checkpoint stopping every car leaving the village. The family told us these checkpoints pop up every day at different times, making it impossible to predict when a delay might occur and making the villagers late for work, appointments, school, etc.

When asked why this village is targeted, Salwa pointed out how close it is to many Israeli settlements. Hamzeh's grandmother told us, "They want to force us into submission. They want to terrify us and control us." Soldiers regularly raid the village, even in the absence of any incidents. They use the family's outdoor staircase to fire tear gas into the village and it blows into the house. Today, we have come to hear about the detention of the their son Hamzeh. At this point he takes over the story.

"They pushed me onto the metal floor of the back of the jeep, kicking me and hitting me with the butts of their guns. They put their feet on top of me. There was an army dog there too. I was terrified." The soldiers spent about two hours in the village, arresting eight more teenagers. They then took Hamzeh and the others to a police station in a nearby settlement. He was put in a room where he stayed until 8 a.m., tied up. He was then taken to interrogation.

He was not informed of his rights. Immediately the interrogator showed him photos of boys throwing stones, demanding Hamzeh identify the boys and name himself in the photos as well. Hamzeh told him he didn't know the boys. He said, "At one point he pulled out his gun and shot some shots through the window. He insulted my family, using bad language about my mother and father. He said if I didn't confess he would kill me." At this point, Hamzeh was so frightened, he agreed to confess to throwing stones. He was brought confession documents written in Hebrew, a language he doesn't understand or read, and forced to sign it.

By 10 at night, Hamzeh was transferred to Ofer military prison. He had not been offered any food since his arrest 20 hours earlier. When he arrived at Ofer, other prisoners gave him some food.

Over the following three months, Hamzeh had six or seven hearings, most of them not lasting more than five minutes. His family attended each hearing, using transportation arranged by the Red Cross. To do so, they had to leave home at four in the morning, and they would not return until nine at night. They were never told the timing of the hearing, so they had to come early, wait to be processed, then wait in a holding area outdoors until their name was called. During the brief

hearings, they could see Hamzeh across the room, handcuffed and shackled at the ankles, and speak to him over the chatter of the lawyers. Each hearing cost them a day's loss in income.

Eventually, Hamzeh was charged with throwing stones, by far the most common charge against minors. He was sentenced to six months in prison, much longer than such sentences used to be. Sentences for this charge have lengthened since the upsurge of violence starting the fall of 2015. His family was also fined 2,000 shekels, a steep figure for this family.

Three months after the arrest, the immediate family was granted permits to visit Hamzeh in prison. The visits require them to wait in line four hours to be processed and wait five hours in a holding area outdoors, all in order to make a 45-minute visit with no contact. They sit across a barrier from their son and use a phone to talk to him. They often brought their baby daughter as Hamzeh said he missed her. His parents laughed remembering something he told them every time they visited: "I just want maklouba, I am craving maklouba," referring to a common home cooked Palestinian dish, literally named "upside-down," made of chicken, rice, and vegetables. After each visit, the family would return home around 10 or 11 at night, again losing the day's income.

Hamzeh told us a little about his experience in prison. He said the most difficult time was the first week, because he wasn't used to being confined and crowded. This was his first experience sleeping away from home.

The prison does not provide toiletries, so the family sent him money to buy soap and shampoo, all at marked-up prices. The prison had no telephones for prisoners, so Hamzeh had to wait for the rare hearings or visits to see or speak to his family, and never with the opportunity for physical contact.

Salwa reminded me the experience is also taxing on the families. His mother Lina told us, "There is a feeling of something always missing when a child is not at home. Everything in the house reminded us of him- his empty bed, sitting down at meals. We missed him every day. We cried." Hamzeh's grandmother said she would pray everyday there wouldn't be a snowstorm, as she hated to think of him cold in prison.



(Hamzeh's cousin fingers prayer beads while listening to the family tell their story)

Throughout Hamzeh's detention, soldiers would come and raid the house on an almost weekly basis. They would arrive at two or three in the morning and take the whole family outside to the courtyard. They ransacked the house, bringing the dogs through every room. They broke items around the house.

During one particularly memorable raid, soldiers took a bag of gold items. In Palestine, married couples give gold as a wedding present. Lina and her sister had their wedding gold in a bag in the house. Hamzeh and his brother had been collecting items for their future brides. The soldiers took the bundle with all the gold items, looked through it, took it, and left the family with a receipt. The family later sent a lawyer to reclaim it. They were told it was unavailable, and that it was forbidden to make any more inquiries about it. Salwa explained that this gold was the family's savings. It's the safest way for them to save money. They work hard, buying gold items as they can, and save them for their future families. The loss of the gold is both sentimentally and financially devastating.

Finally, six months after his arrest, Hamzeh returned home. "The same way I was shocked when I went into prison, I was shocked when I came out," Hamzeh said about his adjustment home. He was particularly stunned at how much his baby sister had grown. She didn't recognize him, and for weeks she cried whenever

she saw him. He didn't expect this, and said it was very difficult.



(Hamzeh's youngest brother and sister play while the family talks)

The family remains traumatized by Hamzeh's arrest and the frequent night raids. The younger children have nightmares. Amer doesn't let himself sleep until six in the morning, saying he wants to be awake in case the soldiers come to the door. Hamzeh's grandmother keeps watch at all hours of the night and day, saying she wants to be the first to see a jeep or soldiers arriving, so she can alert the family and give them a few minutes' warning. Lina said she has moments when she wishes her children were all girls so they would be less likely to be arrested. She told us it doesn't matter if her sons aren't politically engaged; all the villagers are punished for being close to the settlements. She doesn't feel safe even traveling the fifteen minutes to Bethlehem as she worries what would happen to her children in her absence. It seems she has every reason to be afraid for the rest of her children. Currently, 23 minors from their neighborhood

are in prison.

There are practical consequences to Hamzeh's detention as well. Family members have been denied permits to work in Israel since Hamseh's arrest; they were told the denial was due to security reasons. Amer was sponsored for a permit by a Jewish Israeli employer, yet he was still denied. This means a lack of employment opportunity as well as the inability to visit the cultural, religious, and economic center of Palestine- Jerusalem- only fifteen miles away.

Furthermore, Hamzeh was given a suspended sentence for five years. This means that if he is arrested again for any reason, he will be put in prison automatically for one year. Often, soldiers will arrest whoever is in the area of an incident, whether or not the individual had anything to do with the incident. Hamzeh says, "I feel like a target." He keeps a change of clothes by his bed in case soldiers come again to arrest him at night.

Amer laments the lasting effects of this experience on his son: "This was an incredibly hard experience on him, but it didn't end with his return. He lost a school year. He is working in the quarry. It isn't good or healthy. He must study alone for his graduation exam. I am unable to imagine a good future for him. They interrupted his dreams for life. Maybe they broke his ambition to become successful, to study, to have a profession."

Salwa tells Hamseh that the best resistance to the occupation is to become a successful, educated Palestinian. "This is what they fear the most," she says. He seems to agree, telling us that he wants to become an engineer. His middle brother speaks up for the first time, saying, "I have a dream to study in America at Northeastern University and become a doctor." As for the parents' dreams, they tell us: "We wish for the Israelis to leave us alone. We want nothing else. In the end, ultimately, we want nothing. We just want to live in peace."



(The whole family happily poses for a photo with signs of peace. Above them are school photos as well as a memorial to a cousin killed by Israeli soldiers.

Top row, left to right: Amer, Lina, baby sister, grandmother, aunt, cousin, Hamzeh; bottom row left to right: cousin, youngest brother, middle brother)

Lina and Amer thank us for caring about their story and sharing it with others. When asked what they would like the people in our churches to know, Amer says, “We want them to know the truth about the situation, because the media manipulates the truth. The stories about this place are...,” he searches for a word before smiling and saying, “Maklouba- upside-down! They are not accurate. Tell the truth. We don’t want to hide anything; we want the truth revealed. This is the truth- that we love life. We are not terrorists. We have no weapons, nothing. We are going about our lives. We go to work, and we come back home to our families. This is all we want.”

After we sit in silence a few long moments, Salwa asks Hamzeh, “What do you think of the situation?”

“It’s hard,” he says.

***Katie Archibald-Woodward, who took the photographs above, is an American Presbyterian in the process of seeking ordination. She is currently creating a photojournalism project on Israel-Palestine. You can find her writing and photographs at her [blog](#). Please check out her work and keep her in your prayers!**

Palestinian Children in Israeli Military Detention 101

1. Under Israeli military law army commanders have full executive, legislative and judicial authority over 2.8 million Palestinians living in the West Bank. Palestinians have no say in how this authority is exercised.
2. Military courts used to prosecute civilians are permitted under international law but only on a temporary basis. Israeli military courts used to prosecute Palestinians from the West Bank have been operating since 1967.
3. Since 1967, over 1,700 military orders have been issued but few have been promptly translated into Arabic, as is required under the Fourth Geneva Convention. In theory, these laws have no legal effect until translated.
4. Dual Israeli legal systems operate in the West Bank. Palestinians are prosecuted in military courts, whereas Israelis settlers are prosecuted in civilian courts, with far greater rights and protections.
5. Israeli children, including those living in West Bank settlements, have far more rights and protections under civilian law than Palestinian children under military law.
6. In 2013, UNICEF published a report which concluded that "the ill-treatment of children who come in contact with the military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized throughout the process".

- 750,000 - 800,000 Palestinian men, women and children have been detained since 1967.
- Children as young as 12 years can be prosecuted in the military courts.

- Approximately 800-1,000 children detained each year [on average- see recent developments below].
- Children are most commonly prosecuted for stone throwing.
- Approximately half of all detained children are arrested at night and report physical and psychological abuse during arrest, transfer and interrogation.
- Over 99% of cases in the military courts end in conviction.
- Approximately 50% of Palestinian child detainees are held in prisons in Israel in breach of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

***all 101 data from [Military Court Watch](#)- their website is a font of further information and testimonies**

Recent Developments

Regarding Child Detention

From Ma'an News:

In a report released in September, the Palestinian Committee of Prisoners' Affairs said that more than 1,000 Palestinian minors between the ages of 11 and 18 have been detained by Israeli forces since the beginning of the year, a reported increase from 2015. This includes 70 children from occupied East Jerusalem who were placed under house arrest. According to prisoners' rights groups Addameer, a total of 340 Palestinian minors are currently being incarcerated by Israel as political prisoners.

Israeli forces have conducted a [crackdown on Palestinian children in East Jerusalem](#) in recent months, as Palestinian communities in the occupied city have begun to feel the impact of Israeli legislation passed between 2014 and 2015 [increasing penalties for rock throwing](#), which allows for stone throwers to receive a 20-year prison sentence where intent to harm could be proven, and up to 10 years where it could not.

Rights group Defense for Children International - Palestine (DCIP) [cited in a report in July](#) a number of cases of Palestinian minors being handed prison sentences for periods ranging

between 12 to 39 months, with up to three years' probation. According to rights group Defense for Children International - Palestine (DCIP), Israel has also dramatically increased the use of administrative detention -- internment without charge or trial -- against minors. According to DCIP, over the last year 19 Palestinian minors were administratively detained. Prior to October 2015, Israel had reportedly not held a Palestinian child from the occupied West Bank in administrative detention since December 2011.

The widespread arrests put a spotlight on the well documented abuse of Palestinians children by Israeli forces and the harsh interrogation practices used to force their confessions, which has long been the target of criticism by the international community.

Interrogations of Palestinian children can last up to 90 days according to prisoners' rights group Addameer, during which in addition to being beaten and threatened, cases of sexual assault and placement in solitary confinement to elicit confessions are also often reported, while confession documents they are forced to sign are in Hebrew -- a language most Palestinian children do not speak.

The "overwhelming majority" of Palestinian minors held in Israel's Megiddo and Ofer prisons have been tortured during their detention and interrogation, the Palestinian Committee of Prisoners' Affairs also recently reported.

Get Involved in Advocacy on Child Detention!

PC(USA) mission partner American Friends Service Committee and ally Defense for Children International-Palestine have partnered to launch the *No Way to Treat a Child* campaign.

The *No Way to Treat a Child* campaign seeks to challenge Israel's prolonged military occupation of Palestinians by exposing widespread and systematic ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system.

VISION AND MISSION

The *No Way to Treat a Child* campaign is committed to securing a just and viable future for Palestinian children living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and envisions a world where all children attain rights in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards.

The *No Way to Treat a Child* campaign implements an integrative approach that incorporates the use of the international human rights framework and movement building to advance the rights and protection of Palestinian children.

The *No Way to Treat a Child* campaign seeks to challenge Israel's prolonged military occupation of Palestinians by organizing and supporting an extensive network of people demanding immediate protections for Palestinian children held in Israeli military detention where ill-treatment and torture is widespread, systematic, and institutionalized.

The Campaign is involved in regular action alerts, briefings, and education and awareness-raising. You can join their efforts [HERE](#).

**PC(USA) Mission Partners
Participate in the Annual Olive
Harvest!**

The Lutheran World Federation:



From their Facebook page: "The olive harvest began today on the LWF campus on the Mount of Olives with volunteers from College des Freres, a prominent Palestinian educational institution in Jerusalem for 135 years. Thank you for the great start! Notice the helping hands on their t-shirts . . . they are part of the "volunteer work committee" of the school."

Tent of Nations:



"The first day of harvesting the Olives! Thanks to everyone who came and helped out!
The harvest will continue until the 3rd of November!"

YMCA/YWCA/Joint Advocacy Initiative:



"The Olive Picking Program 2016 of the YMCA-YWCA Joint Advocacy Initiative (JAI), in cooperation with the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG), is finished for this year with lots of olives picked out in the fields. The Program lasted from the 15th to the 24th of October and hosted 65 international participants from 12 countries including: Belgium, Sweden, United Kingdom, Ireland, South Korea, Netherlands, France, Spain, Japan, United States, Switzerland and Germany."

**It's not too early to plan for
Advent markets and Christmas
gifts! Support Palestinian fair
trade and artists through the
organisations below!**

Star Bazaar of the Bethlehem Bible College

Meet the Giacaman Family in this [BBC video](#). They started a recycling initiative in Bethlehem to re-purpose broken window panes during the siege of Bethlehem in 2002. Now they use recycled bottles to make their signature Christmas tree ornaments. Order them at our gift shop, the Star Bazaar [HERE](#)!

The Cave Giftshop of the Diyar Consortium

Shop online [HERE](#) for beautiful artisanal crafts like these olive tree leave silver earrings and olive wood decorations!



Pal CraftAid

Support Palestinian fair trade organisations through a Presbyterian-founded distributor [HERE](#).





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