

# Sexual Torture of Palestinian Detainees in Israeli Military Prisons - A Record of Abuse Ignored by the West

**Can you imagine praying for a friend to die?** Yesterday, a friend in Gaza told me that's exactly what he's doing. Not because his friend is terminally ill, but because he is being held in an Israeli military prison and tortured so severely that death seems like mercy. Like most people, I find it hard to speak about sexual torture - it's an ugly subject we instinctively turn away from. But turning away is part of the problem. The silence around what Palestinians endure in these prisons only protects the perpetrators. So I am breaking that silence.

For decades, Palestinian prisoners have described sexual torture and abuse inside Israeli military prisons. These accounts have come from men, women, and children; from Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem; and from every era of Israeli detention policy since 1967. When abuse occurs shortly before release, it has sometimes been confirmed by independent doctors or documented by human rights organizations such as **B'Tselem**, **Amnesty International**, and the **United Nations**. In August 2024, UN experts stated they had received *substantiated reports of widespread sexual assault and rape* of Palestinians in Israeli custody, calling it part of a systemic pattern.

Western media has rarely given these reports sustained attention. By contrast, when Israeli officials alleged mass rape by Hamas on October 7, 2023 - claims the UN was blocked from independently investigating and for which no forensic evidence has been produced - there was wall-to-wall coverage across Western outlets, prominent placement on front pages, and condemnation from heads of state.

## Detention Without Trial

Most Palestinians in Israeli military prisons have not been convicted of any crime. Many have never even been charged. They are held under **administrative detention**, a colonial-era provision allowing imprisonment without trial, without seeing evidence, without access to lawyers, and without contact with family. The International Committee of the Red Cross has been denied access to facilities like **Sde Teiman**, **Megiddo**, and others **long before October 2023**, eliminating a key channel for independent monitoring.

The few cases that reach a military court have a conviction rate exceeding **99%**. Many detainees are under 18 years old; some are children. Throwing a stone in the *direction* of a soldier, vehicle, or watchtower - even if it hits nothing - can lead to imprisonment. In other cases, as former detainees report, the "offense" is as arbitrary as a soldier "not liking your face."

# Methods of Sexual Torture

Testimonies collected by B'Tselem, Amnesty International, the UN, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel reveal recurring techniques:

- **Forced nudity and prolonged sexual humiliation**, sometimes in front of other detainees or guards.
- **Rape with objects**: batons, sticks, metal rods, and in one case a fire extinguisher hose.
- **Genital beatings** with boots, batons, or hammers.
- **Electric shocks to genitals** during interrogations.
- **Sodomy by dogs** and sexual threats involving family members.

These assaults are part of a wider regime of inhuman treatment: shackling, blindfolding, deprivation of food and hygiene, and denial of medical care.

## Case Study: The Gaza Testimony

In August 2025, a friend in Gaza described speaking with a prisoner recently released in an exchange. When he asked about another friend still in detention, the man told him: *“Pray to Allah to take his soul - pray for his death.”*

He explained why. The detainee was stripped naked. A soldier removed the ink tube from a pen, inserted the hollow barrel into his penis, and struck it with a wooden hammer. This method causes unimaginable pain, likely tears the urethra, and risks severe internal bleeding and infection - but leaves little to no visible external injury. It is precisely the kind of torture designed to avoid later detection by human rights observers or doctors.

The same witness described being forced to urinate and defecate in his clothes for two weeks without change - a form of degradation meant to strip away dignity and hope.

## Case Study: The 2024 Sde Teiman Rape Video

In late July 2024, Israeli TV Channel 12 aired leaked surveillance footage from **Sde Teiman** military prison. The video showed IDF soldiers gang-raping a bound Palestinian detainee while a military dog was present. The victim suffered catastrophic injuries - a **ruptured bowel, broken ribs, and lung damage** - and was hospitalized for several days. Shortly after being returned to Sde Teiman, he died under suspicious circumstances. No investigation into his death has been opened.

Ten soldiers were arrested after the leak; five were indicted in February 2025. The arrests sparked far-right protests, including in the Knesset. Likud MK **Hanoch Milwidsky** defended the soldiers, saying that “if he’s Nukhba [ Hamas elite], everything is legitimate.” Protesters stormed Sde Teiman and Beit Lid bases demanding the soldiers’ release, some explicitly calling for the “right to rape” Palestinian detainees.

Under political pressure, the suspects were released within weeks. The main accused, **Meir Ben-Shitrit**, appeared on Israeli talk shows, portrayed by sympathetic media as a hero rather than a perpetrator. The leniency shown to the accused, and their public glorification, underscored the absence of accountability.

## Conclusion

The sexual torture of Palestinian detainees is not an aberration - it is part of a documented, decades-long pattern in Israeli military detention. It occurs within a system designed to strip detainees of dignity, deny them legal recourse, and operate beyond independent scrutiny. The Red Cross has been barred from visiting the worst facilities for years. Western governments that claim to champion human rights have largely ignored these crimes, even as they amplify unsubstantiated allegations when politically expedient.

The Sde Teiman video was a rare piece of hard evidence, confirming what survivors have been saying for generations. Its aftermath - protests for the "right to rape," parliamentary defense of the perpetrators, the death of the victim without investigation - shows a society where such acts are not only tolerated but, in some quarters, celebrated.

For the survivors, the scars are lasting, whether visible or hidden. For those who die, the truth is often buried with them. And for those still imprisoned, the prospect of justice remains as remote as the world's attention.

## Selected References & Quotations

### **B'Tselem - *Welcome to Hell: The Israeli Prison System as a Network of Torture Camps* (Aug 5, 2024)**

"These testimonies indicate a consistent policy of inhuman conditions and abuse, including repeated use of sexual violence in varying degrees of severity."

Full report PDF

### **Amnesty International - *Israel must end mass incommunicado detention and torture of Palestinians from Gaza* (Jul 18, 2024)**

"Palestinian detainees have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence, in violation of the absolute prohibition of such acts under international law."

Report page

### **United Nations OHCHR - *Substantiated reports of widespread abuse, sexual assault and rape in Israeli custody* (Aug 5, 2024)**

"We have received credible accounts from multiple sources, describing sexual violence against men and women in detention, amounting to acts of torture

and war crimes.”

UN Press Release

**Physicians for Human Rights–Israel - *Torture, Starvation and Deaths in Custody* (Feb 2025)**

“The patterns of abuse include sexual violence and denial of medical care, contributing to preventable deaths in detention facilities.”

PHRI page