

Question -1-

32:47 ...32:54

Husam, thank you so much. It was very painful to listen to you. I can't imagine what is like trying to write that. My question is: I know you said, I think, 2015, when they started stealing these bodies, was that as a result of a particular strategy in their plan, or it is just an opportunity to increasing the cruelty that they impose on the Palestinians.

Hussam:

The policy of holding the bodies has been there for decades, most probably from 1967. But most of the retention at that time happened for the Feda'ayeen (the Palestinian revolutionary fighters) who came from outside Palestine. The Israelis used to store them in the Cemeteries of Numbers, as I said. And today, it is known, or it is not officially known, considering the investigations' results, there are 4 cemeteries in different military areas: in the north of Palestine, and in Jericho, and in the other parts of Palestine. In 2008, a huge campaign started aimed to return the bodies of the Palestinian and the Arab martyrs. After many years, Israel released tens or hundreds of bodies. But there is a big number of bodies, because of the way of burying, could not be identified or recognised and they were returned. Several bodies were rejected by the Israeli authorities to be restored and they remained there, including one of the most well-known martyrs, Dalal Al-Mughraby. The Israeli authorities claimed that they restored her body, but this is not true. Her body is still retained with them.

For number of years, they stopped hijacking the bodies but in 13/10/2015, at a cabinet's meeting, they decided to again legitimize the retention of the bodies of the martyrs. So, since this date, they started to store the bodies in freezers. The new thing that happened, by the end of 2015, starting mainly from Jerusalem, there was a revolution by feda'yeen, particularly the youth in Jerusalem.

Even though not all of the martyrs participated in the Palestinian resistance operations against the occupation, but they have been accused falsely of participation and execution of such operations. Therefore, the Israeli authorities executed them in a cold blood and their bodies are still retained.

Hussam: All people who are killed by the Israeli security authorities are considered 'martyrs' whether or not they carried out an action

Hussam: Also, some of the prisoners got ill and died in the prison. Despite that, their bodies got retained and stored in the Israeli freezers.

Until now, the oldest retained prisoner's body was for Abed Al-Hameed Abu Srou, it has been almost from four to five years since the retention of his body, since the new legislation of the Israeli law that allows holding the martyrs' bodies. We have been trying to research about the issue for how long the body can sustain in the freezer under a -40 degree, but nobody gave an answer. Through an unofficial way, we know, through our resources, there are some 4 to 5 bodies have been buried in the Cemeteries of Numbers, not stored in the freezers. Sometimes, we receive an official letter from a court stating that there is an order of removing the body from the freezer to bury it in the Cemeteries of Numbers. One of the families' biggest concerns that their martyrs' bodies are moved from the freezers to the Cemeteries of Numbers because this means that the families will not be able to restore the body for an indefinite period.

To summarize, the main goal of the Israeli policy of the retention of the martyr's bodies is to humiliate the body of the martyr, because they couldn't control him when he was alive resisting them, so they want to return the action by controlling him when he is dead. It is a form of humiliation for the martyr's body by controlling his body, and a way of imposing a collective punishment on the family.

Question -2-:

43:47....44:16

Thank you very much, Hussam. I have heard other lectures about the bodies of children frozen, and some of them with immense incision in their bodies, and I asked myself at that time, whether the children's organs may have been stolen. And I am very keen to know if there is any research on this?

Hussam

Many researches have been conducted on this issue. There are some reports as well. And there have been some recorded interviews with the previous director of Abu Kabir Forensic Institute in Jaffa. Two researchers have made some papers on this issue. One of them is the father of the martyr Bahaa' Mohammed Elian. He is a lawyer and has done his master's degree thesis on this topic. And the second researcher is Khaled E'awidallah. I read papers for them. They gathered some quotations and testimonies from Israeli press and media interviews whether television or newspapers. Also, from foreign/international investigations on the issue.

Another point that makes us suspicious about this matter, it is very difficult to perform research for two reasons: firstly, when you receive the body and hold it, it is delivered in a very difficult state which makes it difficult to explore whether organs have been stolen or not, secondly, due to the Israeli restrictive measures when the families receive the body, they force them to bury the body at night with a minimum number of people present. Although there is supposed an agreement when the Israelis go through negotiations with the family of the martyr; for example, the family requests from the Israeli authority to allow the frozen body to thaw before delivering the body, the Israeli authority-as they used to-always breach the agreement and they give the body frozen. The Israeli authorities deliver the body as a piece of ice, to the extent that the family fears that this piece of ice drops and to be broken into many pieces.

All the doubts and fears indicate that there is something wrong happening. But we cannot either confirm or deny this. For the families of martyrs, the idea by itself, the removal of organs, is extremely dreadful and terrifying.

I have read a report about the trade of organs and skins of the bodies, there are some corruption cases have been going for decades, since the first Palestinian uprising, by the directors of Abu Kabir Forensic Institute in Jaffa.

Hussam The allegations are not new but have been ongoing for decades, since the First Uprising.

Hussam This always leaves question marks over the issue if there are some stolen organs or not, but in all the cases, even the idea by itself, again, is very terrifying and painful for families.

- **Dina:** Basically there has been evidence that Abu Kabir which is the Forensic pathology centre that does all the autopsies of the Palestinian martyrs has been part of ongoing corruption reports for the past ten years, about being in contact with other people who deal with the organ transplants. And that is why this fear is a hanging fear that there might be such a case. So, this basically what Hussam is trying to say. So, the Abu Kabir has been involved in certain reports of corruption with the dealings of people who sell body organs. And so that fear hangs on top of every Palestinian if their son or their daughter reached Abu Kabir this risk might happen. And that is why it is more painful and traumatizing.

Question -3-:

52:55 ---54:35

What are the procedures of negotiations that happen between the martyr's family and the Israeli authorities? What is the amount of money that the Israelis demand from the families of the martyrs to release the hijacked body?

The process of negotiations about delivering or restoring the body is a suffering.

I will give you a very simple example. It is about the family of the martyr Bahaa Elian.

Bahaa's family opened four graves in four different places. Each time there was supposed an agreement between the family and the Israeli official representatives to deliver the Bahaa's body; the family provides the Israeli officials with details about their preparation of the burial of their son in the family graveyard. Although the family open a grave to bury Bahaa, in the last moment, the Israeli authorities rejects the place of the grave and reject releasing the body as promised. Not only that, but also the Israeli authorities give restrictive conditions on the number of people allowed to attend the burial of Bahaa's body and the time of burial. This is a problematic issue for families because when the Israeli authorities only allow 15 people to attend, the families feel concerned of who to include and who to exclude in the list of the 15 people. Also, the Israeli authorities force other tough conditions such as burying the body at the middle of the night in private, and prohibiting the occurrence of any gathering, and they impose a fine on the families to guarantee that the families abide by these conditions. Other than that, they will not return the money if their conditions were ignored.

The Israeli authorities force different procedures on each family. The procedures are not standard. Each case differentiates from the other, even in the way of the burial of the body. For example, Bahaa's family were able to see Bahaa; his mother was able to stay with his body for minutes and talk to him, to say goodbye; while other families were not even able to say goodbye for their children, but they receive the coffin completely closed. The Red Cross take the body and they do not allow the family to see the body because the body is not in a state to be seen. Moreover, the differences of level of power and strength of the families affect the procedures. Some families have the strength to negotiate the procedure and others have the power to use connections. For example, the father of the 15-year-old martyr, Hassan Manasra, had the strength to reject delivering

his son's body because he stipulated and demanded to receive his son's body unfrozen, but the Israeli officials disappointed him and delivered the body as a piece of ice. They took Hasan's body back. The strength of that father could be understood as he went through a story. Ten years ago, he lost another child in an accident. When his first child died, he immediately took his son's body to the house and prayed for him in the mosque at the same night, and he did not allow his son's body to be frozen or to stay in the morgue temporarily. After months of waiting, struggle, and patience to deliver his son's body, and then he rejects receiving the body in that state, shows something exceptional of his strength. The same situation happened with another family, the other family tried to reach Manasra's family to take their opinion over their situation, Mansra's father told them to do what they feel comfortable with. They could not act in the same way as Manasra's family did. They took their frozen son's body and buried it. So, every family has its' own abilities, strengths, stories, and situations. Therefore, they act upon the situation differently.

In general, from the families' experience, about when the body can be retained and who will be returned as a martyr and who will not, it differs. the power of resilience varies depending on the martyr's identity, story, faction (belonging to a party)...etc. It differs from a case to a case. For example, Hassan Manasrah, he was a child, and it is obvious that even if Hassan attempted to carry out an action by knife, he can be jailed, not killed. However, they killed him in a cold blood. So they (the Israeli authority) decided it is better to close his case, but others not in the same situation.

Question -4-

01:06:48

We feel pretty helpless, I'm in the UK, and we want to support the families that are suffering, but we don't know how to do that, we don't know if we contact the authorities will they just ignore the communication, or whether it would be good to be linked directly with the families for people who want to give support, may be

individually or collectively from groups or branches of PSC?. It must be very lonely if you feel there is not people supporting from the outside?

Hussam

Yes, this is much needed and respected. People need to feel they are connected. And they need to feel that people in the other side of the world know what is happening for them and are in solidarity. I think there are two different organisations who are available to be contacted on this regard, for such cases. The first one is the National Campaign for Releasing the Bodies of the Martyrs.

Ramy commented: "We have a national campaign for releasing the Palestinian bodies. It's a national campaign that concentrates on the bodies not only the new era of detaining the bodies, but we are talking about the bodies that are still in the cemeteries of numbers. We as Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Centre (JLAC) that initiated this campaign and also we are working on the legal representation for the families in order to release the martyrs' bodies. There are still 64 bodies are still with (the Israeli authorities) since 2015, and more than 253 bodies that are still captured by the Israeli authorities since 70's and 80's. Right now, we are finalizing a report ... <audio is not clear> ... this issue from a legal side and how the Israeli authorities are taking and legalising the capture of the Palestinian bodies. And we have a chapter that is comparing this issue with the Spanish Franco era when he was using this method to retain the revolutionists' bodies and until now the place of the bodies are unknown. I will write down the contact numbers for this campaign and our coordinator Salwa will be in contact. Any help in Europe it would be helpful in order to put pressure on the Israeli authorities to stop this policy against the Palestinian bodies.

Husam continued: In addition to this centre, there is a committee of the families whose martyrs' bodies are retained. It is not an official organisation, but an informal, not registered and not institutionalized family committees. However, these committees are

popular and effective, and they have addresses to contact. These committees include the families of the martyrs that I mentioned before such as Manasra and Bahaa Elan.

Question -5-

01:13:21.....

Is there any role of the National Committee for Palestinian Martyrs and Political Prisoners in releasing the bodies of the martyrs? It is a national organisation lie in different parts of the West Bank aims to follow and supervise the issues of prisoners and Palestinian martyrs.

Hussam

After the legalisation of the law that allows holding the Palestinian bodies by the occupation authorities -with my respect to all the efforts by the organisations that I mentioned before- it is still not enough to stop this policy of retention. I think there should be a united voice and a combined action and effort through all the local organisations and institutions, the Palestinian families' committees, and the international advocates of Palestinian rights.

Rana added: The Israelis made it a law and they legitimised the possibility that captain (in the military) can actually take the decision of detaining the body on the spot. So now its a legitimised action and its up to the captain in the field to make that decision. And therefore there is a need to have a concerted effort to have all parties to work together to stand up for these policies

Ramy added: Just to add one thing for what Salah said, right now we have a national team that was assigned by the Ministry of Palestinian Justice, the minister himself is heading this team, and we are working together along with the families and Adala from the Palestinian 1948 land, Adala has some cases which they are following with the commission itself (the Commission of the Palestinian Prisoner and Released Prisoners). It started from December 2019 and we are still working and I want to add one thing

because I think this forum from the UK Palestine Mental Health Network, we have submitted a letter to the General Consul of Britain in Jerusalem last November. We sent a remainder of the policy of retaining the Palestinian bodies, but unfortunately this letter was neglected, we have not received any response. Right now we are looking to have a meeting with a representative of the United Nations in Jerusalem, and unfortunately they are neglecting our request to meet them in order to tell them about the families' suffering, about the policy itself (of holding the bodies), and if this Network helps us to raise this issue, it would be greatly appreciated.

Question -6-

01:19:42

Hussam, do you have any final comments before you finish?

Hussam

Yes, I want to finish with a story of the mother of the martyr Abed El-Hameed Abu Srou. When I made an interview with them for my paper, I spent the entire day in their house with the family, nearly 6 to 7 hours.

The mother was living in Al- Yarmouk refugee camp in the city of Damascus. When she was a child in 1982, her father was working with one of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) offices in Fakhani district in Beirut, while she was staying with her family in Damascus. Her father was a victim of the Israeli invasion on Beirut where an Israeli shelling attacked the same building of her father's office. He was left under the rubble for 7 days. Her mother rejected to open a funeral for the father or to be considered as a widow until she receives the body of her husband. After seven days of collaboration of the PLO members and Feda'yeen searching under the rubble, they found his body and brought him to Damascus. The state of the body was in a very painfully bad shape, so the doctor decided not to allow anyone under the age of 50 to say goodbye to the body. After they had delivered the body, they buried him in the Martyrs' Cemetery in

Damascus. She said that the first thing we do in Eid, we used to go to the cemetery and visit his grave. So, she lived the same tragedy with her father whose name is Abed El-Hameed, the same name of her martyr son. In spite of the fact that she passed through the same situation and she knows that the body will not be delivered in a good shape, she is still waiting to wash her son's body. And despite the fact that she received an official letter from the occupation authority that the body is buried in the Cemetery of Numbers, she still hopes that her son is still alive as she has not received the body yet. The Cemetery of Numbers named like this because they consider the martyrs are just numbers. They do not identify them by even by their names. Each martyr has a story and a family. And each family has its own story, suffering and history. And Abd El-Hameed's family story reflects this pain. I shed the light on some of these stories; however, many other families have different stories of resilience and pain. Mourning and grieving over the death of their loved ones will never end. The fact that they could not say goodbye to their martyr children will maintain the wound open. It is a continuous suffering for the family for not being able to bury their children's bodies.