

Halaseh, Therese. Interviewed 2011. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.

In prison there were 2 blocks: Block B for Arab women and Block A for Jewish women. Block A was for convicted criminals such as drug dealers and thieves etc.... As a holder of the Israeli ID I was imprisoned in Block A. This meant that I was imprisoned with Jewish women. I appealed and demanded to be imprisoned in Block B. They always refused my demands. The Israeli Minister of Interior always rejected my demands. The minister of interior was also head of prisons authority. One day I Jewish prisoners attacked me and beat me brutally. I was taken to hospital. After that they moved me to Block B. Whenever there was a strike I was under the threat of being moved back to Block A. We, the female political prisoners, had a well-established system for strikes.

We always organised strikes on the anniversary of the fall of Palestine and other national occasions especially those concerning the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause. This was totally unacceptable for the prison's authorities. In prison they had a rapid intervention unit – in Hebrew its called Yam. The soldiers in this unit were trained to beat us brutally and to attack us using with poisonous gases. One-day members of Israeli parliament happened to visit the prison after we were attacked with those gases. The situation was so bad that they couldn't stand being in the prison. It was announced that prohibited gases were being used in confined places. According to what the Israeli Parliamentarians told us the use of those gases was prohibited even in open spaces. We were continuously under the threat of attack by the Yam unit as we organised many strikes. We organised political strikes on the anniversary the fall of Palestine, during political events taking place outside the prison or against any massacre against the Palestinian people. Those were our political demands. We also had everyday demands focusing on smaller issues such as demanding more soap, more napkins, hot water and cleaning products. We had to organise strikes in order to achieve those demands. Life in prison was also about education and knowledge. In prison we offered classes to imprisoned children who were arrested before finishing their studies. We had prisoners 14 and 15 years old. Those children didn't finish Tawjihi so offered them Tawjihi classes. We organised many strikes and wrote many letters demanding that the authorities and the Prison's administration recognise the education we offered. We demanded that a supervisor from the ministry of education comes to prison to supervise Twajih exams. Thank god all the girls that sat

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for Tawijih passed. This gave us a new demand. The new demand was university education. We started organizing and demanding university education but I was released before we achieved this demand.

In prison we offered normal academic education that included languages such as English and Hebrew as well as mathematics. This was considered holy for all the prisoners. Everyone who attended the classes was very committed to learning. We also taught older women how to read and write. We read them stories and novels. Many of them learnt enough to be able to read the newspaper after which we started asking them to start reading books. We held sessions to learn about other revolutions from around the world. We analyzed the Lebanese crisis as it affected the Palestinian cause directly. We studied the Russian and Vietnamese revolutions. One time the General Director of the prison authorities visited the prison and found us all setting listening to an educational lecture. When he saw how committed and disciplined we were to the point that none of us looked away from the lecturer despite his presence in the prison he said that in this prison, and I'm sure he meant all the other prisons as all the other cadres did the same thing, they are creating leaders who would leave the prison to lead. When he said that we understood that he would be taking measures against us. The books, pens and notebooks were confiscated. We organised strikes and they retaliated by always brutally beating us. When I was released we were in the middle of a hunger strike. The soldiers attacked us with incendiary gas. When I was released I still had burns on my face and our demand to give us back the books, booklets and pens was not met yet.

Family visits were denied on many occasions for many of the prisoners. We were allowed one family visit per month. During strikes visits were not allowed. After the strikes we were often denied visits as a punishment. This was a great suffering. I don't want to talk a lot about our suffering. I just want to say that this rapid intervention unit is a brutal unit that doesn't believe in anything except cruelty.

Release in a Prisoner Exchange Deal

There were negotiations around a prisoners exchange. Those negotiations took a very long time. While he was under siege in Tripoli Abu Ammar negotiated the prisoner exchange deal. At the time we were on a strike. I was ordered to leave the cells. At the time it was known if a strike was taking place and they took any of the prison's leadership away that meant they were being transferred either to another prison or moved to solitary confinement. When they took me away they didn't take me to solitary confinement but to

the prison's administration. I thought to myself I was going to be exiled. But they didn't take me the transport vehicle but to the warehouse where I was given my belongings. Having lived in Akka and learnt Hebrew I could read "to be released" was written on the letter. I asked the officer why I was being released but she didn't say why. They made us board a big bus. I can't remember what it was called exactly but it didn't have any seats. The bust was like a cell but with a wide floor. They made us board the bus and they drove for a very long time. Lid Airport was only 15 minutes drive from the prison. We left the prison at 2 in the afternoon and arrived at the airport at 9 in the evening. They kept driving for 7 straight hours and didn't make a stop anywhere. When we got to the airport we realized that there a prisoner exchange was taking place. We entered the Red Cross tent. The Israeli army wasn't allowed to enter this tent. I asked the Red Cross representative on what basis we were being exiled outside our country and why we weren't to stay in our country. He said this was the deal agreed and that we all have to leave the country. I told him I wouldn't accept exile. He said if I don't accept it the whole deal would collapse. I asked him why would this happen. I told him that there was a brother called Omar al-Qassem who should have been released according to the deal and whom Israel has refused to release and yet the deal wasn't collapsing. Then all of us discussed and we agreed to sign and leave. The Red Cross representative told me I wasn't Israeli or Palestinian but Jordanian. I told him I wasn't signing the deal and that I was proud of being Jordanian. I told him I was asking why the Palestinians should be forced to leave their country. Anyway the exchange was concluded. We were flown to Egypt as it was the only Arab country that had relations with Israel. From Egypt we were flown to Algeria. In Algeria we had a very warm welcome from the Algerian leadership, the Algerian President, Algerian Parliamentarians and the PLO. There were a lot of people welcoming us. It was very heart warming. This was taking place at the same time Abu Ammar was under siege in Tripoli. This is how the prisoner exchange took place. In Algeria we needed to decide where to go from there. I chose to go to Jordan even though a few other Arab states offered me diplomatic status. I didn't want diplomatic status or anything like it. I wanted to be a normal citizen in Jordan. I didn't want to go to another Arab country I wanted to live in Jordan. My trip to Jordan was delayed because of bureaucracy. 3 months later I went to Jordan. I got married and I have 3 children; 1 girl and 2 boys. The three of them are attending university. I'm the head of the Committee for the Wounded. Most of our work is not political but rather social. We help the wounded with their children's education providing some financial help. Most of the wounded have low salaries.