



## Marking UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

July 2010

### Background

The United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture is observed every year on 26 June, the day on which the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, entered into force in 1987. The Convention obliges signatory States<sup>1</sup> to make torture a crime and to prosecute and punish those guilty of it. More than 100 States have ratified the Convention against Torture, yet it continues to be reported globally, even in these countries.



A boy holds up a sign in Tulkarem: "We must work together in support of Victims of Torture"

Torture is one of the most severe violations of human rights, and takes a terrible toll on thousands of Palestinians and their families. According to Defence for Children International – Palestine Section (DCI-PS)<sup>2</sup>, every year around 700 Palestinian children are arrested, interrogated and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system. Currently there are 305 Palestinian minors being held in prisons inside Israel. Many of these children report being ill-treated, and in some cases tortured. DCI-PS recently submitted 14 cases to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture for further investigation.



Writing messages to children who are currently in detention

### Activities to mark UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

To mark the Day, East Jerusalem YMCA and Save the Children organised a number of activities throughout the West Bank, as part of the "Post-trauma Rehabilitation of Palestinian Ex-detainee Children" Programme, which is funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO). The Programme provides psycho-social support for ex-detainee children and their families, in addition to vocational training and career counselling, to develop a positive and hopeful future and to uplift children's spirits and hopes, either through taking up a job, or returning back to school.



Children march with banners through Tulkarem, with the message "Education for the prisoner is a basic right"



Wafa Devea, YMCA Rehabilitation Programme Social Worker speaks at a workshop in Beit Ommar



Child ex-detainees write on balloons as a symbolic way of sending messages to other children who are currently detained

<sup>1</sup> Signatory States to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

<http://www.hrweb.org/legal/catsigs.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dci-pal.org/>

## Events throughout the West Bank...

### Ramallah

On Monday 28 June 2010, an event was organised by East Jerusalem YMCA-Rehabilitation Programme and Save the Children in Ramallah, to observe the Day. It was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Prisoners' and Ex-detainees' Affairs, members of the local and international NGO community, ex-detainees and their families. Attendees wrote messages to child prisoners which were later attached to helium-filled balloons that were then released into the sky by child ex-detainees, as a symbol of solidarity with all child detainees.



Ali telling his story

At the event, mothers of Palestinian children who are currently in prison shared their stories, in addition to child ex-detainees. Ali, who is now 15 years old, and has been arrested twice by the Israeli authorities, described the torture he went through during the different stages of arrest, "From the moment I was arrested, I was beaten. The soldiers took me into the military jeep and started hitting my face, my chest and all over. I was blindfolded and handcuffed, and later my hands started to bleed because the handcuffs were so tight. My hands are still scarred from the handcuffs". Ali has been participating in the Rehabilitation Programme for one month and is hoping to eventually go into vocational training. Other speakers at the event included representatives of the Ministry of Prisoners' and Ex-detainees' Affairs and "Al-Haq" - Palestinian human rights organization.

### Tulkarem

On Tuesday 29 June 2010, children and adults in Tulkarem participated in a march to mark the occasion. The march was organised by East Jerusalem YMCA-Rehabilitation Programme and Save the Children, in cooperation with the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, the Ministry of Prisoners' and Ex-detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development. A number of mothers of detainees and ex-detainees marched through the streets of Tulkarem, along with children and representatives of 33 local and international NGOs, to raise awareness of the prison experience for children and the affects of torture on Palestinian prisoners. A number of passers-by asked what the march was about and decided to join in with their children and families.



Children in Tulkarem carrying a picture of their brother who is currently detained

### Beit Ommar Village, near Hebron



A group of children who have spent time in Israeli prison perform a play about their experience

A workshop entitled "Challenges facing Palestinian Children in Detention" took place in Beit Ommar Municipal Park near Hebron on Monday 5 July 2010. Speakers at the workshop included the Governor of Hebron District, the head of Beit Ommar municipality and representatives from the Ministry of Detainees and Ex-detainees' Affairs, the ICRC, Defence for Children International and the Committee of Prisoners' Families. A group of child ex-detainees performed a moving play about the prison experience for children.

"Many of the children who participate in the post-trauma rehabilitation programme report recurring nightmares and flashbacks, due to the experiences they went through in prison. Often these children withdraw from their family and school, and feel that they no longer trust anyone, says Lama Odeh, the supervisor for the YMCA Rehabilitation Programme in Ramallah.

The project provides hope for many children. Mohammad who is now 18 years old was detained for 12 months 2 years ago. Upon his release he heard about the Programme from Faris, a YMCA counselor who is from the same neighbourhood as Mohammad, in Bethlehem. Eventually after taking part in ventilation activities and group counseling sessions for a year, Mohammed decided to return to university to pursue his education. He is now in his second year of university and continues to volunteer with the Programme by talking about his experience and encouraging others to take part in it. Mohammad says, "My most distinct memory of being in prison is waking up in the middle of the night and sobbing as I would remember that my mother used to wake me up for school every day when I was at home. I may have been humiliated and tortured in prison, but I am not going to let that take away my right to education."

Eyad Al Araj, Country Director of Save the Children Sweden, placed a strong emphasis on the rights of child detainees, "Torture cannot be justified under any circumstances. The children who have had to endure torture in Israeli and Palestinian prisons, interrogation centres and detention centres are suffering the devastating consequences of these unacceptable acts. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that governments should ensure that children are properly cared for, and protected from violence, abuse and neglect by anyone who looks after them. It is the responsibility of the State to ensure that all use of torture and cruel or degrading treatment on children is put to an end immediately."