

Israel-Hamas war

UN report accuses Israel of abusing Palestinian prisoners

Agency operating in Gaza says detainees were subject to beatings and sexual violence, claims that Israeli forces deny



A relative hugs a Palestinian prisoner, left. UNRWA interviewed some of the 1,002 Gazans detained and then freed by Israel since the agency started monitoring releases in December © AFP via Getty Images

James Shotter in Jerusalem and **Andrew England** in London YESTERDAY

A confidential UN report has accused Israel of widespread abuse of Gazans it has detained during the war with Hamas, according to a copy seen by the Financial Times.

The report by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, said that Palestinians released from Israeli detention reported being subjected to abuses ranging from physical assaults and dog attacks to sleep deprivation and sexual violence.

“The beatings included blunt force trauma to the head, shoulders, kidneys, neck, back and legs with metal bars and the butts of guns and boots, in some cases resulting in broken ribs, separated shoulders and lasting injuries,” said the 11-page report.

“Multiple individuals released from detention reported deaths of detainees in the military barracks, including injured and sick detainees who were denied medication and medical treatment.”

Detainees also recounted being stripped down to their underwear or, in some cases, until they were completely naked, and some said that they had been held in the cold without access to toilets, water or food for more than 24 hours.

“According to individuals released from detention, ill-treatment was used in attempts to extract information or confessions. to intimidate and humiliate. and to punish.”

to exact information or confession, to intimidate and humiliate, and to punish," said the UNRWA document, which was first reported by the New York Times.

The Israel Defense Forces said in a statement that it had acted in compliance with Israeli and international law and "denies general and unsubstantiated claims regarding abuse of detainees, including claims about sexual abuse in IDF's detention facilities". It also denied the use of sleep deprivation.

"The mistreatment of detainees during their time in detention or whilst under interrogation violates IDF values and contravenes IDF orders and is therefore absolutely prohibited," it said.

"These claims are another cynical attempt to create a false equivalency with the systematic use of rape as a weapon of war by Hamas."

[Israel](#) has long sought to close down UNRWA, which it has accused of supporting Hamas. It alleged in January that 12 of the agency's employees had taken part in the October 7 attack by Hamas that triggered the war, although it has provided only limited evidence to support its claims.

It has since said it has intelligence that as many as 30 UNRWA staff took part in the [October 7 attack](#) or its aftermath, and last week said that 450 of its employees were members of Hamas or other Palestinian militant groups.

More than a dozen countries suspended funding to the agency following Israel's allegations, but in recent days Canada and Sweden have said that they would resume funding.

UNRWA, whose 13,000 staff in Gaza play a crucial role in the provision of aid in the besieged enclave, has terminated the contracts of several of the staff accused by Israel. The UN is investigating the allegations.

The UNRWA report seen by the FT also claims that some UNRWA staff who were themselves detained by Israel had been subject to "threats and coercion by the Israeli authorities while in detention, and pressured to make false statements against the agency, including that the agency has affiliations with Hamas and that UNRWA staff members took part in the 7 October 2023 atrocities".

The Israeli military said that Hamas was "conducting information and psychological warfare in which it lies and invents false narratives that have no factual basis".

"Detainees who return to the strip are subject to the control of the terrorist organisation which can harm them and force them to speak out against the state of

Israel against their will, as part of the information war it is conducting,” it said.

The UNRWA report was based on interviews with some of the 1,002 Gazans detained and then freed by Israel since UNRWA started monitoring the releases in December.

UNRWA estimated that in total, Israel may have detained as many as 4,000 Gazans since the start of the war in October.

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