

Palestinian beaten before death in Israeli custody

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Israeli forces fire tear gas at Palestinians after Friday prayers at the entrance of Issawiya, a Palestinian Arab neighbourhood in occupied East Jerusalem [File: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP]

Occupied East Jerusalem, July 27 (RHC)-- The family of a Palestinian man who died in Israeli custody has alleged he was beaten by Israeli forces in the detention center before his death, citing reports by other detainees and photos released after his death.

Abdo Yusuf al-Khatib al-Tamimi, 43, died at the notorious Moskabiya detention center, also known as the Russian Compound, in West Jerusalem on Friday, July 23rd. Al-Tamimi, a married father of four from the Shuafat refugee camp in occupied East Jerusalem, had been arrested several days earlier on a minor traffic violation.

His pregnant wife Rana said detainees had told the family al-Tamimi had been beaten by Israeli forces before his death. "Our family received calls from other prisoners in adjacent cells in the Moskabiya stating that they had heard al-Tamimi screaming and the sound of blows raining down on him before he subsequently went quiet," she told Al Jazeera. "He went into prison a healthy man with no health issues."

Amal Taha, Rana's mother, said that according to other prisoners there had been a confrontation with prison guards prior to the alleged assault on her son-in-law. "Abdo together with three other prisoners had been shouting 'Allahu Akbar,' because it was Eid al-Adha, and were subsequently told by prison guards that this was not allowed," Taha told Al Jazeera.

"My son-in-law argued with the guards and the argument escalated to the point that he was separated from the other three and taken into a cell on his own before the others heard him screaming before there was silence."

Photos released after his death show a deep gash on his head which was subsequently stitched up, a bloody wound on his knee and extensive bruising on other parts of his body.

The Israeli Prison Services (IPS) announced that he had been "found dead" in his cell three days after his arrest. "Although medics sought to revive him, they were unsuccessful and he died on the spot," the IPS said in a statement, adding that it would investigate the circumstances of his death "as with any other such incident."

Al-Tamimi's body was reportedly taken to the Abu Kabir Forensic Institute in occupied East Jerusalem for an autopsy performed by the Israeli authorities in the presence of a Palestinian doctor. The autopsy results have not yet been made public.

The family said their request to speak to a senior official at Abu Kabir about the autopsy had been denied by the Israeli authorities.

The United Nations Human Rights Office in the occupied Palestinian territories said on July 23 it was "deeply concerned" about al-Tamimi's death. "The UN Human Rights Offices urges Israeli authorities to release the autopsy report and to pursue an independent and transparent investigation into Mr al-Tamimi's death."

According to Palestinian media outlet Wafa, "Several detainees' institutions, including the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, and the Palestinian Prisoner's Society held the Israeli occupation authorities fully responsible for the death of Abdo al-Tamimi."

Israel's Moskabiya detention center has a dire history when it comes to the treatment and interrogation of Palestinian prisoners. According to Palestinian prisoners' organization Addameer, at least 73 Palestinians were killed during Israeli interrogations at various prisons, including in Moskabiya, since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967.

"Despite the absolute prohibition against torture, enshrined under article two of the International Convention against Torture, and ratified by Israel on October 3, 1991, torture against Palestinian detainees is systematic and widespread in Israeli occupation prisons and interrogation centres,"

Addameer said in a 2020 report.

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