



PRESS RELEASE

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Global Sumud Flotilla Volunteers Recount Abuse on ‘Torture Boat’

May 22, 2026 **ISTANBUL** – Participants from the Global Sumud Flotilla, now in Istanbul, have begun providing harrowing testimony about widespread abuse, assault and torture: rubber bullets fired at close range, tasers to the face and upper body, stun grenades thrown into groups of detainees, stress positions held for hours under permanent bright light, hijabs (Muslim religious headcovers) forcibly removed, as well as various forms of sexual violence including: humiliating strip searches, sexual taunting, groping and pulling of genitals, and multiple accounts of rape.

Some of the most horrifying accounts centre on a single vessel that participants call the “torture boat.” This specific Israeli naval vessel with a makeshift prison constructed of barbed wire and metal shipping containers became the primary site of intense violence following the interception; this reflects a small fraction of the patterns of systemic violence and sexual abuse against the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israeli regime for decades.

THE TORTURE BOAT

In what is believed to be the US-built-and-funded INS Nahshon, detainees were “processed” one by one, and taken into darkened containers where groups of iOF commandos brutalised them one by one. Yassine Benjelloun, who had sailed on a previous flotilla mission and expected comparable treatment, described the moment of entry:

“He throws me in a container that is dark, and all of a sudden, I hear, “Welcome to Israel.” And I start getting hit, like first hit on the head, second hit in the ribs, then I fall, then they kick me. And I’m hearing people screaming, and all of a sudden people stop screaming, and I don’t see anything, and I don’t know what’s going to happen.”

— Yassine Benjelloun

Adrien Berthel, France, described being singled out for targeted humiliation and beating after iOF soldiers noticed he was wearing nail polish and made assumptions about his sexuality.

Veronica Otero, participant number 22 to board, witnessed the processing of nearly all 180 detainees across three days:

“I can say that all were in many ways abused, not one single person walking with nothing. Among them there were 36 fractures, many broken ribs, torso, shoulders, and back. People were in agony. People were not breathing [due to the broken ribs].”

— Veronica Otero

At least 12 sexual assaults have been documented on that vessel alone, including anal rape and forcible penetration by a handgun. iOF soldiers tased volunteers in the face, neck and body, the strikes multiplying with each new group brought in. Multiple volunteers report being photographed during strip searches and guards laughing throughout.

ASHDOD: DEGRADATION AS STATE PERFORMANCE

At Ashdod port, the violence continued: beatings, broken ribs, sexual humiliation with severity that far exceeded the [videos](#) posted by National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir that sparked global and diplomatic outrage. Participants were subject to torture, extreme stress positions and prolonged interrogations.

WHAT PALESTINIANS ENDURE WITHOUT A RELEASE DATE

Everything our participants experienced, they experienced for days. Palestinian political prisoners, hostages and those even outside the prisons have experienced this violence and abuse, including sexual abuse, for decades. Over 9,000 Palestinians are currently held in Israeli prisons; more than 3,500 under administrative detention, without charge or trial, under orders renewed indefinitely. Over 400 of those illegally detained are children, and [Save the Children has documented that 69% of detained children report experiencing sexual violence and abuse.](#)

"We need to make sure we are very clear that what we experienced was a tiny percentage of what Palestinians in Israeli prisons experience every single day."

— Catriona Graham

And as the GSF explains:

"For the Palestinians passing through this colonial legal system, there are no consular officials. No legal teams. No journalists waiting at the airport. They are not deported after a few days."

ACCOUNTABILITY IS NOT OPTIONAL

The Global Sumud Flotilla calls on governments, international institutions, and legal bodies to act; not to issue statements, but to act.

We call for:

1. A full, independent international investigation into the interception of the Global Sumud Flotilla and the treatment of all detained participants, with direct reference to testimonies collected by Adalah and by participants themselves, and with specific focus on the crimes committed aboard the torture boat, including rape.
2. The immediate, unconditional release of all Palestinian political prisoners and hostages held without charge under administrative detention, including those who endure daily what our participants endured for just days.
3. Immediate and unrestricted access for the International Committee of the Red Cross to Palestinian hostages and prisoners. The denial of access to detainees by the International Committee of the Red Cross constitutes a serious violation of

international humanitarian law and raises grave concerns regarding torture, medical neglect, starvation, sexual violence, and other abuses committed inside detention facilities.

4. Sanctions against israel commensurate with documented violations of international law, including: the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Geneva Conventions, and the Convention Against Torture; not statements of concern that leave every funding and arms relationship intact.
5. An immediate end to the blockade of Gaza, which the International Court of Justice and independent legal experts have repeatedly characterised as collective punishment in violation of international humanitarian law.
6. The referral by all relevant states of israeli officials responsible for ordering, conducting, and facilitating the interception of the flotilla to the International Criminal Court and all applicable international accountability mechanisms.

Adalah, The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in israel has documented these violations with precision and at considerable personal and institutional risk. We acknowledge their work and stand in full solidarity with their legal advocacy.

BACKGROUND ON THE ABUSE AND TORTURE OF PALESTINIANS IN THE ISRAELI PRISON SYSTEM

The realities of abuse and violence, including sexual violence that the Palestinian people have suffered have been studied and reported with little to no condemnation, outrage or action from global leaders. While the resources below are not an exhaustive list, they do show the long-standing systemic violence that the israeli regime has executed with impunity:

- [NRC-Sexual Violence and Forcible Transfer in the West Bank](#)
- [OHCHR-Israel's Use of Sexual and Gender Based Violence Since 2023](#)
- [BTselem-The Israeli Prison System is a Network of Torture Camps](#)
- [UN Special Report on Sexual Violence](#)

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