**Updated: Neglected Facts About Hunger-Striking Samer Issawi**

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CAMERA.org

<http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=2&x_article=2401>

As Palestinian prisoner Samer Issawi has allegedly exceeded more than 200 days of a hunger strike, Palestinian demonstrations and NGO activity on his behalf have intensified, and so too has media coverage. Though some media outlets have demonstrated great interest in Issawi's case, that interest is decidedly selective.

Take for instance the following photograph and caption which appeared in yesterday's Ha'aretz English edition on page 2. (It did not appear in the Hebrew edition.)



This prominent photograph is huge -- it runs across five columns, and is 5.5 inches tall. The caption, however, is extremely brief. It states:

Palestinians in Ramallah yesterday holding placards depicting Samer Issawi, who is jailed in an Israeli prison and has been on hunger strike for 209 days. Palestinians have been protesting on Issawi's behalf for several days.

Despite the fact that space constraints were not an issue here -- again, the photograph is gigantic, and is the largest in the day's paper -- the editors left out key information: Who is Samer Issawi and why had he been imprisoned?

According to the [Israel Prison Service](http://shabas.gov.il/list1.xls), Samer Issawi of Issawiyeh, Jerusalem was arrested in April 2002 and sentenced to 26 years for attempted murder, belonging to an unrecognized (terror) organization, military training, and possession of weapons, arms and explosive materials. Issawi (identification number 037274735) was one of the 477 Palestinian prisoners released in the first stage of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange in October 2011. (The Prison Service lists him as Samir Tariq Ahmad Muhammad. Multiple names are not uncommon among Palestinians. The date of his arrest, birth, his sentence term and the terms of his release are consistent with the details provided about Samer Issawi in media reports.)

In an October 2011 letter to the editor of the Guardian, Amir Ofek of the Israeli embassy in London took that paper to task for failing to provide information about Issawi's terror activities. He [detailed](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/19/prisoner-swap-prospects-for-peace):

Your centrefold (19 October) carries a double-spread photograph of released prisoner Samer Tareq al-Issawi in a cheering crowd, after being freed under the terms of the deal to release Gilad Shalit. It is important to point out the grave terrorism offences of which Al-Issawi was convicted, including firing a gun at a civilian vehicle in October 2001, indiscriminately firing an AK47 assault rifle at civilian buses, and manufacturing and distributing pipe bombs used in attacks on Israeli civilians.

The Israeli Ha'aretz (which has no excuse for not consulting the Prison Service document in Hebrew which details the prisoners' indictments) did no better than the British Guardian. Had Ha'aretz editors even marginally shrunk the enormous photograph, they would have been able to include half a sentence regarding Issawi's violent acts directed against Israeli civilians. By failing to include even a few minimal words about Issawi's terror activities, Ha'aretz gives an imcomplete, sanitized picture, leaving open the possibility that he had been incarcerated for stone-throwing or less.

As part of the Shalit deal, a condition of Issawi's release was that he had to remain in Jerusalem. In July 2012 he [reportedly](http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/east-jerusalem-villagers-israel-police-subjecting-us-to-collective-punishment.premium-1.491264) violated the terms of his release by leaving Jerusalem and crossing into the nearby neighborhood of A-Ram, and was therefore rearrested.

Other media outlets have also failed to report Issawi's violent activities. [AFP](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_world/view/1255007/1/.html), which has reported extensively over the last few days about Issawi's hunger strike, is rather vague about Issawi's violent crimes:

Issawi, 33, and Sharawna, 36, **were long-term security prisoners**who were initially released by Israel under a prisoner swap deal in October 2011.  
  
But within months, they were both rearrested following unspecified allegations that they violated the terms of the agreement, with Israel ordering them to serve out the remainder of their original sentences.  
  
Sharawna was rearrested on January 31 and began refusing food on July 1 to protest against his re-arrest and demand his immediate release.  
  
Issawi was arrested on July 7 and stopped eating on August 1, to protest over his re-arrest and retrial based on information which was not made available to him or his lawyer. (Emphasis added.)

Likewise, AP does not specify why Issawi was imprisoned in the first place, although it does does a slightly better job than AFP. AP [reports](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=172310490):

Issawi's original sentence was 26 years "for a terrorist act" but he had served only six years, [Israel Prison spokeswoman Sivan] Weizman said. [sic: He served nine years, from April 2002 until October 2011.]

The four were re-arrested and sent to prison for violating the terms of their release, Weizman said. She said Issawi was banned from entering the West Bank but entered three times after he was freed.

It's unfortunate that the prison spokeswoman failed to specify Issawi's terrorist acts (and that she also misstated the length of the term that he served), but AP could have easily consulted the list of released prisoners and their crimes for more detailed information, as CAMERA had done. (Indeed, after AP's [earlier, October 2011, whitewashing](http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=2&x_outlet=2&x_article=2139) of the crimes of another Palestinian prisoner released as part of the Shalit deal, CAMERA had been in touch with AP editors. After pointing out the Prison Service document, AP commendably corrected.)

**How Long a Hunger Strike?**

Ha'aretz's photo caption yesterday reported as fact that Issawi "has been on hunger strike for 209 days," while the AP [reported](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-02-15/world/37108901_1_issa-qaraqe-minister-of-prisoner-affairs-israeli-prison-service-spokeswoman) that Issawi "has been on an on-again, off-again hunger strikefor several months" (emphasis added). According to the Feb. 15 article by [Ian Deitch](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Feb-15/206615-palestinian-rally-for-hunger-striker-turns-violent.ashx#axzz2LLmjUUel), there are conflicting claims about the extent of Issawi's hunger strike. He reported:

Issawi is under medical supervision and **eats periodically**, [Prison spokesman Sivan Weizman] said.

Issawi's sister, Shirin, said he has been **on hunger strike for 206 days.**She said he has only been drinking water since January. She said the prisontakes her brother to an Israeli hospital for treatment.

The Palestinian minister of prisoner affairs, Issa Qaraqe, said Issawi **began his fast in August and has been observing it intermittently**.

In other words, the Israeli prison spokeswoman and the Palestinian minister of prisoner affairs agree that Issawi has been eating periodically, yet Ha'aretz reports as fact that he "has been on strike for 209 days." Even a partial hunger strike is most certainly a difficult ordeal. But why is it so difficult for Ha'aretz to stick with the facts? How long will the paper continue to supply its English readers with a steady stream of agenda-driven, whitewashed propaganda?

**Feb. 20 Update: More Details Emerge About Issawi's Violent Acts**

Capt. Eytan Buchman, an IDF spokesman, has provided CAMERA with additional details about Issawi's terror activities. He writes that Issawi

was convicted of severe crimes, which including five attempts of intentional death. This included four shootings, between July 2001 and February 2002, in which Isawi and his partners fired on police cars and buses travelling between Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem. In one attack, a policeman was injured and required surgery. On October 30, 2001, Isawi, together with an accomplice, fired at two students walking from the Hebrew University campus to their car in a nearby parking lot. In another case, Isawi provided guns and explosive devices to a squad, who fired on a bus. Finally, in December 2001, Isawi ordered an attack on security personnel at Hebrew University, providing a squad with a pistol and a pipebomb. Two of the squad members tracked security personnel but opted not to execute the attack.