

# Beating and abuse of Palestinians by the Israeli Security Forces

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Violence against Palestinians by Israeli security forces is not new; it has accompanied the occupation for many years. With the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada, however, a significant increase in the number of beatings and instances of abuse has occurred, in part because of increased friction between Palestinians and Israeli security forces. According to many testimonies given to B'Tselem and other human rights organizations, the security forces use violence, at times gross violence, against Palestinians unnecessarily and without justification.

Most cases involve a "small dose" of ill-treatment such as a slap, a kick, an insult, a pointless delay at checkpoints, or degrading treatment. These acts have become an integral part of Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories. From time to time, however, cases of severe brutality occur.

Many instances of abuse are not exposed because they have become the norm, and, for Palestinians, filing complaints is very time consuming. Furthermore, many Palestinians, primarily those who entered Israel without a permit, even refrain from filing complaints in cases of severe brutality because they fear that filing the complaint will only bring harm on themselves. Based on past experience, many do not file complaints because of lack of trust in the system - a system which tends not to believe them, and which tends to protect rather than prosecute those who injured them. The numerous restrictions on movement imposed by Israel in the Occupied Territories make it very difficult for Palestinians who want to file complaints to do so.

Israeli law, like international law, allows security forces to use reasonable force in self-defense and for duty-related purposes such as dispersing rioters, arresting suspects resisting arrest, and preventing a detainee from fleeing. The law does not, however, allow beatings, degradation, or ill-treatment of persons who are not rioting, resisting arrest, or fleeing. Also, the requirement that reasonable force be used in those instances where force is allowed demands that the measures taken be limited in severity to that which is necessary to prevent commission of the offense.

The acts described in testimonies given to B'Tselem and to other human rights organizations deviate greatly from what the law allows, and they constitute flagrant violations of human rights. In this context, an Israeli district court held that, "The exercise of illegal force by police officers is a phenomenon characteristic of regimes that are abhorrent, and undemocratic, of the kind that trample on human rights. It is misuse of the [police officer's] function."

Cases of beatings and abuse receive special condemnation. For example, the former Minister of Public Security, Shlomo Ben-Ami, stated: "I relate with great severity to brutality by police officers. I think that that, among the possible sins committed by the police, this is gravest, because the police cannot fight violence by employing violence against citizens." Regarding another incident, in which a soldier beat a settler from Kedumim, the IDF Spokesperson responded that, "The IDF views with great severity the case and violence by IDF soldiers."

These condemnations, however, remain solely declarative. Security forces, meanwhile, misusing their power, continue to abuse and beat Palestinians, among them minors. Both the army and the Border Police have yet to make it unequivocally clear to security forces serving in the Occupied Territories that it is absolutely forbidden to abuse and beat Palestinians, and their educational and information actions in this regard have been more lip service than a frank and honest attempt to uproot the phenomenon once and for all.

Until a few years ago, the Israel Police Force itself investigated claims of police brutality. In 1992, handling of these claims was transferred to the Department for the Investigation of Police (DIP) in the Ministry of Justice. B'Tselem forwards to the DIP testimonies it receives regarding police brutality against Palestinians and requests that the matters be investigated and that the offending police officers be prosecuted. In many cases, the DIP responds that the file is closed for reasons such as "offender unknown" or "insufficient proof." At times, the DIP decides to close a file following an incomplete investigation or when the complainant was unable to reach DIP offices to give testimony because the complainant's request to enter Israel was rejected. And in those cases in which police officers are prosecuted, they receive light sentences.

The defense establishment's refusal to issue a message of this kind to forces serving in the Occupied Territories has far-reaching consequences. If a message is sent to security forces, it is that even if the establishment does not accept acts of violence, it will not take measures against those who commit them. The effect of such a message is that the lives and dignity of Palestinians are meaningless and that security forces can continue, pursuant to the function they serve, to abuse, humiliate, and beat Palestinians with whom they come into contact.

Israel is the occupier in the Occupied Territories and as such is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the Palestinians who live there. To perform this function, B'Tselem urges the Israeli authorities to adopt, at least, the following measures:

- Clarify unequivocally to all security forces serving in the Occupied Territories, through detailed education and information programs, the absolute prohibition on abusing and beating Palestinians, even when they ostensibly violate the law;
- Seriously investigate every complaint filed by Palestinians regarding beatings and abuse by security forces;
- Suspend, until the end of the investigation against them, police officers and soldiers suspected of using force, and where the investigation indicates that the complaint is justified, prosecute the offenders;
- Require all security forces coming in contact with the Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Territories to wear identification tags in Hebrew and Arabic to enable identification of those who used violence or otherwise violated the law.



[More on beating and abuse](#) [2]

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