Palestinian prisoners agree to end hunger strike following promise of concessions

Montreal, May 15, 2012 — On Monday May 14, after Israeli authorities promised important concessions, an estimated 2500 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails apparently ended their four-week hunger strike. Two hunger strikers who had initiated their hunger strike March 1 were near death, and six others in critical condition, when a deal was reported to have been struck. Under the deal, brokered by Jordan and Egypt, the jail terms of prisoners imprisoned without charge or trial (“administrative detention”) will no longer be renewed unless fresh information or evidence is presented to an Israeli military judge. As well, Israel will end solitary confinement and allow about 400 prisoners from Gaza to receive family visits, denied them since 2007.

Around 1000 prisoners initiated the strike April 17. By late April the numbers on strike had grown to about 2000. As demonstrations supporting the strikers intensified in the West Bank and Gaza, and the prisoners’ condition deteriorated, speculation grew that the death of any of the strikers would lead to new popular protests. With Palestinians’ annual May 15 commemoration of their 1948 dispossession approaching, Israel was under considerable pressure to meet the prisoners’ demands for due process. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UN officials and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas urged Israel to either release the prisoners in administrative detention, or charge and try them in procedures meeting international fair trial standards.

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) welcomes the apparent end to the strike, but urges Canadian MPs to press Israel more energetically to respect basic human rights norms. “Canadian MPs must do their utmost to ensure that Israel permanently ends the practices of detention without charge or trial, arbitrary and lengthy solitary confinement and other abuses,” says CJPME President Thomas Woodley. CJPME also calls upon Canadian MPs to promptly urge Israel to move the prisoners in extremely fragile condition to a hospital where they can be fed and rehydrated under appropriate medical supervision, unavailable in the prison clinics.

Tensions in the West Bank and Gaza had ratcheted up as the strike went on. Around 40 percent of Palestinian men in the occupied Palestinian territories have been jailed at one time or another, therefore both the detentions themselves and the prisoners’ treatment while in jail concern many Palestinians. CJPME notes that Israeli occupation forces often jail Palestinians for years on end for “offences” not considered crimes in a democracy, while giving others lengthy sentences for relatively minor offences, for example, for throwing stones at occupation tanks and troops.

About CJPME – Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) is a non-profit and secular organization bringing together men and women of all backgrounds who labour to see justice and peace take root again in the Middle East. Its mission is to empower decision-makers to view all sides with fairness and to promote the equitable and sustainable development of the region.

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