



Key Palestinian prisoner exchange deals with the Israeli occupation

Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners' Society (PPS)
January 2025

In this briefing paper, the Palestinian Commission of Detainees' Affairs and the Palestinian Prisoners' Society (PPS) present information about the key prisoner exchanges in the history of the Palestinian struggle with the occupation.

Historically, the release of Palestinian political prisoners took place through two methods: 1) as part of political negotiations of the "peace process" 2) following military operations by Palestinians that included taking occupation soldiers and settlers captive.

Since the start of the Israeli occupation, there have been a total of 40 documented prisoner exchanges and political deals to release Palestinian political prisoners.

The most recent prisoner exchange took place in November 2023, at the start of the occupation's genocide in Gaza, when 240 Palestinian political prisoners were released, including 71 women and 169 children.

As for the first category (prisoner releases as part of the political process), the last such agreement took place in 2013. A total of 78 veteran Palestinian political prisoners, who had been arrested before the signing of the Oslo Accords, were released in three batches. In 2014, occupation authorities refused to release a fourth batch of 30 Palestinian prisoners.

LIST OF KEY PRISONER EXCHANGES

1) **July 23, 1968:** the first prisoner exchange between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli occupation took place. This followed the successful hijacking of an Israeli El-Al commercial flight by Palestinian resistance fighters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The deal was concluded through the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the passengers were released in exchange for 37 Palestinian political prisoners with long sentences, including prisoners who had been detained since before 1967.

2) **January 28, 1971:** a prisoner exchange operation took place between the Fatah political party and armed group, and the Israeli occupation. The latter released Palestinian political prisoner Mahmoud Baker Hijazi in exchange for Israeli occupation soldier Shmuel Fayeze (Rosenwasser) who had been kidnapped by Fatah in 1969. Hijazi was the first Palestinian to be detained in the recent Palestinian revolution starting from January 1, 1965. He was arrested on January 18, 1965, and was sentenced to death at the time, but the death penalty was not carried out. The prisoner exchange took place at Ras al-Naqoura in the north of occupied Palestine, under the auspices of the ICRC. Afterwards, Hijazi went to Lebanon, and then returned to Gaza following the Oslo Agreements in 1994. He passed away in Ramallah in 2021.



3) **March 14, 1979:** The Litani prisoner exchange operation, also known as "Operation Al-Nawras," in Arabic, took place. The PFLP – General Command, one of the factions of the PLO, released an Israeli occupation soldier it had captured during the Litani operation. In return, Israel released 76 Palestinian detainees, including 12 female prisoners.

4) **November 23, 1983:** Prisoner exchange deal between the Israeli occupation and the Fatah movement. Israel released all detainees held at the Ansar detention camp in southern Lebanon, totaling 4,700 Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners, as well as 65 prisoners from Israeli jails, in exchange for the release of six Israeli occupation soldiers.

5) **May 20, 1985:** Prisoner exchange deal between the Israeli occupation and the PFLP, known as "Operation Galilee". Under this operation, Israel released 1,155 Palestinian prisoners who had been held in various Israeli prisons. These included 883 detainees who were held in Israeli prisons in the 1967-occupied Palestinian territories, as well as 118 prisoners who had been kidnapped from the Ansar detention camp in southern Lebanon during the 1983 exchange deal with Fatah, and 154 detainees who had been transferred from the Ansar camp to the Atlit detention camp during the Israeli occupation's withdrawal from southern Lebanon. In exchange, three soldiers held by the PFLP were released.

6) **October 1, 2009:** Israel released 20 female Palestinian prisoners from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in exchange for information about the condition of occupation soldier Gilad Shalit, who had been held by Palestinian resistance groups in Gaza since June 25, 2006. The exchange involved Israel receiving a two-minute, newly recorded video showing Shalit in good health. The video was considered part of the negotiations for a larger prisoner exchange agreement.

7) **October 18, 2011:** The Wafaa al-Ahrar prisoner exchange deal took place, through Egyptian mediation, between the Palestinian resistance groups holding Israeli occupation soldier Gilad Shalit captive, and the Israeli occupation government. As part of the deal, Shalit was released in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian political prisoners, including 994 males and 33 females. Of them, 205 prisoners were exiled to Gaza and abroad, including 163 prisoners from the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem who were sent to Gaza, and 42 exiled abroad.

8) **November 22, 2023:** A humanitarian ceasefire deal was agreed upon at the start of the genocide in Gaza. The agreement included the release of 50 Israeli and international captives held by resistance factions in exchange for the release of 150 Palestinian political prisoners over the course of four days. The ceasefire was extended for an additional three days, and the number of Palestinians freed increased to 240, including 169 children and 71 women.

***Information gathered and verified by Palestinian prisoner institutions and the expert on prisoners' affairs, Abdelnasser Farwana.**