

Voices From The Occupation



Name: Jihad A.
Date of Arrest: 29 April 2010
Age at arrest: 16 years
Accusation: Throwing stones and Molotov cocktails

On 29 April 2010, a 16-year-old boy was arrested by Israeli soldiers from the family home at 1:00am. On 13 May he was transferred to a prison inside Israel in contravention of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Jihad and his mother speak about prison visits.

Jihad was asleep when soldiers stormed the family home at 1:00am, back in April 2010. *'We all came out of the house to the yard and I saw six jeeps, a truck, and many soldiers surrounding the house,'* recalls Jihad. The soldiers tied and blindfolded Jihad and put him on the floor of a military vehicle before transferring him to Huwwara Interrogation and Detention Centre, in the occupied West Bank. Several days later Jihad was taken to another detention centre for interrogation. *'The interrogator Saleh accused me of throwing stones and Molotov cocktails,'* recalls Jihad. *'He kept shouting and saying he would send me to the cells in Al Jalame detention centre. He said he would give me a military interrogation. I became very scared of the interrogator.'*



Three hours into the interrogation, Jihad confessed, and on 13 May, he was transferred to Megiddo Prison, inside Israel.

Under Israeli prison regulations, prisoners are supposed to receive a family visit every two weeks. However, Jihad did not receive his first visit until 10 August, more than three months after his arrest. *'I don't know why I was denied family visits,'* says Jihad, *'I tried to ask around but all they told me was that there was 'confidential information' against me. I still don't know what information they are talking about.'* Jihad's mother Najat recalls those three months *'as the worst three months of my life. It was the first time any of my children had slept outside the house. It was a very difficult time.'* Najat recalls that it took the Israeli authorities more than two-and-a-half months to process her application to visit her son in prison inside Israel.

Jihad was expecting a second family visit on 24 August, but no one from his family came. *'One of the detainees from my village was told by his family that the Red Cross had called my mother and informed her that they could not visit me. I still don't know why they don't allow family visits. When the children in my room receive family visits, I feel terrible because they get to see their families and I don't. When they return to the room they have money and clothes and things get a little better for them. I don't know the news of my family, my friends or my school,'* says Jihad. *'I feel a huge gap because of the lack of communication. I'm losing so many details that I consider important to know. I want to see them. I want to talk to them. I was told that my family is really upset because of this.'* Jihad says he knows many children who are denied family visits.

Jihad's mother and two younger brothers, Amjad (10) and Abdel Rahman (3) were finally allowed to visit him again on 21 September 2010. *'I hardly had any sleep the night before,'* recalls Najat. *'I was worried I wouldn't wake up in time to catch the Red Cross bus to Megiddo. I so badly wanted to get enough sleep to be in good shape the following day, but I couldn't. This is what always happens to me the night before the prison visit.'* Najat left the family home at 6:00am the next morning, with her two youngest children. *'I didn't have anything to eat or drink, I had no appetite. We waited 45 minutes for the bus at the junction and arrived at Qalqiliya checkpoint at around 7:15am. There were about 100 people at the checkpoint,'* recalls Najat. *'The checkpoint was packed and we queued in line and waited our*

turn. Soldiers x-rayed our bags, checked our identification cards and our Red Cross tickets on their computers and asked us to go through the turnstiles without our shoes. Meanwhile, soldiers with big guns shouted at us through loudspeakers from concrete bridges installed two metres above our heads. We were caged, and nobody could go in or out. At one point soldiers asked my two young boys to go through the turnstile on their own, but I refused. I was terrified to be separated from them; they are too young to go on their own. In the end they allowed me to keep my youngest son with me, but insisted that Amjad go through another gate on his own.' Once Najat had passed through the checkpoint with her children, she waited another two hours for everybody to pass through before boarding the bus which then took them to Megiddo Prison, where Jihad was waiting.

On arrival outside the prison, Najat bought ten packets of cigarettes to take to Jihad, 'not because he smokes, but because he trades cigarettes for other things that he needs in prison, like shampoo and soft drinks,' says Najat. 'I also bought more cigarettes to take to other prisoners who are deprived of family visits as punishment. Jihad wanted me to do this as a favour to them. I also had a T-shirt and some underwear for Jihad.' Once inside the prison, Najat waited for Jihad's name to be called and then hurried towards the glass partition separating the visitors from the inmates.



'I was so happy to see Jihad,' remembers Najat, 'but I couldn't touch or kiss him. I spoke to him through an intercom system which I think is controlled by the soldiers. It was difficult for us to hear each other because all the other families were talking to their children at the same time. He asked me about his friends back in the village and wanted to know the news of relatives and friends. He was very happy to see his youngest brother; he had asked me to bring him along with me this time. My youngest son was overwhelmed and confused and didn't say a word.'

Najat asked her son how he was, and how he spent his time in prison. 'He told me he shared a room with 10 other children and they cooked their own food. They had an electric kettle in the room which they used to boil eggs and potatoes and to make coffee and tea. We had hardly started talking when the intercom was suddenly disconnected. The visit had lasted 45 minutes. I left at 12:00 through another door feeling both happy and sad at the same time.'

Najat waited outside the prison with her two children until 2:30pm for the bus to take them back to Qalqiliya checkpoint. 'It was 6:30pm when we finally got home completely drained, nearly 12 hours after leaving.' Najat's permit to visit Jihad is valid until 29 July 2011, but her husband was only given a one-time permit to visit their son. 'Jihad has still not been sentenced,' says Najat. 'I think he has already had eight or nine court appearances. I so badly want him out of prison. He missed the last two months of school when he was arrested. I am worried he might lose interest in school the longer he stays in jail. I miss him. The house feels different without him. I regret not having a picture of him like I do for my other children. The only picture I have of him is the one on his identification card.'

Jihad will be sentenced on 31 October 2010, to 10 months imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 shekels (US \$780), as part of a plea bargain arrangement. Although Jihad maintains his innocence and says that he was threatened during interrogation, pleading guilty in the Israeli military court system is usually the quickest way for children to be released. Each year, around 700 Palestinian children are arrested and prosecuted in the Israeli military court system. The most common charge is for throwing stones. Like Jihad, the majority of these children are transferred to prisons inside Israel in contravention of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and most children do not receive any visits for the first three months. Some children receive no family visits at all for unspecified 'security' reasons. Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons are also not permitted to use the telephone to stay in touch.

The evidence supporting this *Voices from the Occupation* was collected by lawyers and fieldworkers from the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) and DCI-Palestine.