**Palestinians pay the price of hatred
*Political arrests: a settlement of accounts between "Fateh" and "Hamas"***The conflict between Fatah and Hamas, which erupted in June 2007, indicated that when "brothers" fight, they legitimize every thing: blood is no longer a red line; political arrests and torture go unquestioned. In the same context, the violation of human rights and laws becomes part of an undeclared race where such violations are viewed as a means of winning additional points. It is worth remembering that the outbreak of political arrests started earlier than this conflict.

The Palestinian society witnessed political arrests for the first time in 1996. The budding Palestinian Authority carried out broad political arrests among Hamas leaders. Eleven years later, "Hamas" became the supreme political and military power in the Gaza Strip. Hamas has chosen a military settlement fueled by the lives of approximately 250 Palestinians. As a result, both political parties carried out political arrests and practiced torture against the supporters of each other. Subsequently, law and human rights violations were recorded collectively.

Up to that moment, the toll of torturing political prisoners in the Palestinian Territory amounted to six: five in the Gaza Strip and one in the West Bank. Torture left hundreds of detainees with scars or permanent disabilities; the luckiest were not physically hurt but their civil rights were violated.

Accurate figures on the number of political detainees are not available for any legal Palestinian authority because of the refusal of both parties to give accurate figures and statistics. Additionally, the numbers of detainees are changing on a daily basis.

According to the Ramallah-based Al Ahaq Institution “since June 2007 until March 2008, about 800 to 1000 political prisoners were detained by each side."
The latest victim of the political arrests is clerk Majed Al-Barghuthi, who died in the Ramallah-based Palestinian intelligence headquarters in Feb. 26, 2008, after nine days of arrest. Fawzia al-Barghuthi, Majed’s wife, confirmed that her husband "died as a result of torture; his family, eyewitnesses and the media were able to eyewitness and record the effects of torture on Majed’s body before burial". This testimony comes in line with the Palestinian intelligence’s arrest of the nurse Najeh Asi, on the charge of "leaking" pictures of the body from the Ramallah-based Khaled hospital where the body was hosted.

The Palestinian intelligence and Authority swiftly denied the accusations and confirmed on the Palestinian Satellite Channel, using the medical examiner report, that "The cause of death was cardiac i.e. inflation of the heart muscles". Barghuthi's wife confirmed that the "her sportive non- smoking” husband “was in good health and had no medical history". The 44-year-old Barghuthi was the imam of the Cooper village mosque, west of Ramallah, and the father of eight children - the youngest has not yet celebrated his first birthday.

A day after officially announcing his death, an investigation committee was formed by the PLC parliamentary bloc members -"Fatah" and "Hamas" members were excluded- to reveal the causes of Barghuthi’s death. Results of the investigation were to be announced by the first week of March, 2008. It is March 14 now and no results have as yet been announced.

Despite the tragedy of the Barghuthi family, they are still luckier than the five other detainees’ families who died in Hamas prisons, in Gaza Strip. The media had not covered their deaths, which were not properly highlighted in Gaza. Yet no investigation committees were formed to reveal the causes of deaths and the involved parties.

Gaza-based human rights organizations confirmed that Abdullah Qashtah, Rami Khalifa, Abdullah Abu Rjelah, Muhammad Dahmash, and Walid Abu Dilfeh died in the Gaza-based Hamas prisons and detention centers. The families of these victims dared not even talk to the media for fear of reprisals. They do not have the ability to prosecute "Hamas" or those who tortured their sons because (Hamas) is the de-facto government, which overwhelms judiciary matters in the Gaza Strip.

Stirred by fear, the Abu Dilfeh family refused making any statements to the media. Nevertheless, informed sources reported that Walid Abu Dilfeh and his brother Khalil were arrested for more than five days at Al Mashtal prison.  Walid died because of continuous torture. "The same sources which refused to disclose identity, confirmed that "Abu Dilfeh was continuously lifted up and severely beaten all along the duration of his detention. He lost consciousness many times and died on the fifth day, handcuffed and lifted up in a position that allowed only for his toes to touch the ground".

A detainee who was locked in an adjacent cell revealed, "When Abu Dilfeh lost consciousness for the last time, the investigators could not awake him up. They summoned their leader who began shouting at them and said: “you shouldn’t have lifted him up like that, the iron handcuffs have put too much pressure on his hands!"   Well-informed family and legal sources said that the medical examiner’s initial autopsy report indicated that "death was caused by blood nervous shock resulting from serious injuries".

It is worth mentioning that the Al Shifa hospital, where the autopsy was done - refused to hand in to the Abu Dilfeh family the final medical examiner’s autopsy report, on the grounds that the senior administrative positions at the hospital are fully controlled by Hamas, which dismissed dozens of staff because of their political affiliation, or lack of satisfaction with the Hamas administration. The same sources added, "photos documented the effects of severe torture on Abu Dilfeh’s body; the bluish body was ripped apart in different places". The 44-year-old Abu Dilfeh who was the father of six girls and used to run a glass factory in Gaza, passed away on July 15, 2007.

**Media unbiased towards victims**
Noticeably, following the death of each and every political prisoner, the Palestinian media - which has also become affiliated - played an inflammatory role. It adopted the narration of its affiliates. For example, in the case of Majd Al Barghouthi, the three major daily newspapers: Al Quds, Al Ayyam and Al Hayyat Al Jadedah, which are published in Ramallah, the PSC and the Palestinian News Agency (WAFA), adopted the narration of the PNA. They circulated the medical examiner’s report without referring whatsoever to the family members’ viewpoints. ". In the case of Abu Dilfeh and the rest of the other political detainees who died in the prisons of "Hamas", the Hamas "Palestine" Newspaper and Al-Aqsa Satellite Channel, which broadcasts from the Gaza Strip, adopted the viewpoint of "Hamas": the detainees died because of diseases or because they were left handcuffed and eyes blindfolded at the targeted Executive Forces headquarters’ during the Israeli forces’ attacks. "Hamas" stated that Abdullah Qeshtah was not evacuated during the Israeli shelling of its headquarter. He was forgotten while its members were trying to escape their lives! In the same context, then Minister of Foreign Affairs with the Hamas government, Mahmoud Zahar, stated on Al Aqsa Satellite Channel, that Abu Dilfeh committed suicide by hanging himself; previously, he tried to escape many times from Al Mashtal Prison."

Remarkably, each media outlet adopted the political point of view of one of the parties. When a story is associated with torture and death, the media strives to disclose the details for the sake of exposing and uncovering the offenses of the other party only. Professionalism is not a request. Until last month (Feb. 2008) the Palestinian newspapers did not mention anything about the PA arresting "Hamas" activists. When the issue jumped to the surface, it was reported briefly and concisely, while simultaneously lacking objectivity.

Regarding the use of the cyber net, both parties, "Fatah" and "Hamas", manifested professionalism in waging media wars. Those interested found it easy to discover the details of the deaths of political detainees in the prisons of "Hamas” by visiting "Fatah"-oriented websites. Likewise, "Hamas"-oriented websites would provide a plethora of details and pictures proving the involvement of "Fatah" in torturing the supporters of "Hamas". YouTube had even been used to expand the horizon of the political war to make it fiercer and of greater impact.

**Dozens of detention centers**
The PA and Hamas opened tens of illegal detention centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinians are detained on the basis of their political affiliation for long periods of times that may exceed 80 days, in violation of the law. Detainees are not referred to the prosecution or the court in an explicit violation of the Palestinian Penal Procedural Act No. (119), which stipulates that a detainee should be referred to the prosecution and then to the court, at the latest after 48 hours of detention.

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights reported that the PNA has 30 political prisoners’ detention centers in the West Bank under the supervision of the secret services, the intelligence and the preventive security forces, which in turn, directly follows the Ministry of the Interior. Each security apparatus supervises 10 centers.

For its part, “Hamas” turned all the police stations and the headquarters of the Executive Force - an armed force formed by "Hamas" after winning the 2006 Palestinian legislative council elections - and a large number of mosques in Gaza into detention centers, which is directly linked to the Ministry of the Interior of Ismail Haniya’s resigned government.

Detention in the security centers is a violation of law, since political prisoners should be detained by the Palestinian police in its prisons, only as stipulated by the Palestinian law.

**Torture, a phenomenon**
Torture and human rights violations are unevenly practiced in the detention centers, which spread all along the West Bank and Gaza Strip, various human rights centers confirm. The director of Al Haq Institution, Shahwan Jabareen confirms, "Severe torture has become a phenomenon both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip." The Popular Front PLC member Khalida Jarrar stated, "the PNA practices torture against political detainees in the security headquarters". She further pinpointed that during visits to detention centers, some detainees assured her of having been tortured, while others confirmed having been ill-treated during the period of their detention, as families and lawyers were deprived from the right to visit them.

The detention centers and headquarters acquired a bad reputation before the public; everyone preys never to find himself trapped in Al Mashtal police headquarters in Al Naser area, Gaza, which was named after an arboretum, now called the slaughterhouse. Many of the families living beside it have abandoned their homes because of the permanent screams of the tortured detainees. In the West Bank, a young man from Nablus who preferred not to mention his name was arrested and detained for a whole month on the grounds that he had a fight with another young man in December said, "I used to hear the screams of men tortured in other sections. I asked a guard about the reason for torturing them and whether I will be treated in the same way; he assured me that only Hamas supporters are tortured.”

The Palestinian Interior Minister, Abdel Razak Yahya, refused to comment or answer questions on whether torturing Hamas detainees was acknowledged by the ministry or not.

As for Hamas, it totally denies practicing political detention against the supporters and leaders of “Fatah” in Gaza. The Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, Ismail Radwan, confirmed that "all the detainees in Hamas jails are being held for criminal or security reasons." Radwan rejected claims by the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights and other human rights organizations about the deaths of five Palestinians in "Hamas” prisons as a result of torture or for being left behind at the headquarters of the Executive Forces, knowing that they were continuously being bombarded by the Israeli forces. He declared that these claims were absolutely wrong and that it was illness or Israeli bombing which caused the deaths inside the (Hamas) prisons.

Those arrested or tortured at the PA or "Hamas" prisons confirm that charges are ready-made. The Fatah leader S.M., who was arrested for two months at Al Mashtal prison said, "When the detainee arrives at Al Mashtal, he finds a charge which ranges from theft, possession of drugs, prostitution, homosexuality or collaboration with the Israeli occupation tailored for him. In fact, the detainee is arrested for supporting Fatah and heading or working for a security apparatus before a Hamas coup.”  S.M., who was an officer at a PA security apparatus before the Hamas coup said: “I was arrested and detained for more than 15 years at the Israeli prisons but I have never been tortured or abused the way it was done to me at Al-Mashtal.” His brother said that when S.M. was released; he had lost more than 20 kilograms, his body was covered with blue bruises, his back was bent for more than a week and he had more than one hernia in his abdomen because he was severely beaten.  His children were not able to recognize him. Afraid of Hamas’ revenge, S.M. preferred to keep his name, place of residence and the name of the security apparatus where he was working unknown. “I was lifted up for long hours every day, my hands were tied with ropes and chains  behind my back and a number of men used to severely beat me up until I lost consciousness", he said.  Two months later, he was released upon family mediation with Hamas figures in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sweden and Ismail Haniya himself. He said "I used to hear the voices and shouts of those who tortured me but I have never seen their faces. My eyes were blindfolded all the time, when the wrap slightly moves because of beating, I used to see fully masked men.”

The 35-year-old Azzam al Fahal, who was arrested with clerk Majed Al-Barghuti and four other members of “Hamas”, talked about spending hours lifted up to the window and severely beaten on the head and body for long hours at the headquarters of the Palestinian intelligence. The PA intelligence detained Al Fahel, who runs a kiosk for selling falafel and studies at Al-Quds Open University for a period of 13 days. The first night, I slept in a cell on a piece of cardboard in my underwear at a time when the weather was very cold. After they beat me, they asked me to dance. I started jumping. I was beaten continuously with a rubber hose on my head until I lost consciousness. When I woke up, they asked me to sign papers. Later on, they claimed that they were my confessions. Moreover, I was allowed to go to the bathroom twice a day for one minute and always accompanied by a soldier who insisted on closely watching me while defecating or taking a bath”. They released me and Al Barghuthi’s friends to absorb anger but I expect to be arrested at any moment, said Al Fahal. The PA charges Hamas detainees of possessing weapons or planning a coup. In fact, they are detained for supporting Hamas.

Both parties have practiced sophisticated forms of torture, anything is allowed: flogging, severe beatings, lifting the detainee up for long hours and psychological pressure like threatening to kill them. In some cases, detainees were tortured by planting nails in the detainee’s legs; Tareq Mansour’s case is an example. Nails were hammered into Mansour’s legs by "Hamas" in Gaza. Other detainees were tortured by being pierced with screwdrivers on their bodies, like the PA tortured Magdi Abdel Hadi Jabbour from Nablus. A she relative of a Fatah activist in Gaza who refused to disclose her name and the name of their relative said that her relative "shouted in the face of the Executive Force ,while they were torturing him, confirming that his affiliation to Fatah would not change whatever happened. Fatah moves in his blood, he shouted. Accordingly, the Executive Force members seriously wounded him and let him bleed until his blood percentage dropped to four!”

Observers and human rights organizations confirmed that most of these practices are stirred by the desire for retaliation. The researcher at the Gaza-based Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, Samir Zaqqout, believes that “detention and torture are not a Hamas product, they are part of revenge and settling of accounts", he continues, “most of the recorded field murders, political arrests and torture took place in Khan Younis,which is a stronghold for Fatah leaders’ families." On the other hand, Radwan denies that Hamas has resorted to revenge, although he described the attack on Hamas leaders in the Palestinian Authority jails in 1996, including him, as a "massacre" and not mere torture.

**Investigators re-produce torture practices**
Interestingly, the majority of investigators from both sides who were originally detained by the Israeli occupation forces re-enact the Israeli occupants’ investigation and torture tactics in one way or another. A number of investigators, both from "Fatah" and "Hamas", refused to answer any question that relates to this issue or even admit that they were torturing detainees. The director of the Centre for Treatment and Rehabilitation of Victims of Torture, psychiatrist Mahmud Sohueil, said: "Most of the torturers on both sides have been subjected to similar practices by the Israeli occupation forces. Basically, some of the tortured reproduce what they have been subject to in a more violent way”. Most of the tortured and humiliated on both sides refuse to admit that they have been subject to these practices despite the effects of torture on their bodies and their psychological status. Sohueil believes that "One of the important implications of torture is the victim’s feeling of shame and disgrace; therefore, victims prefer to keep silent". In this regard, he confirmed that the "increase in the numbers of torture victims who have consulted the centre in the previous period is worrying", "40% of the tortured suffer trauma”, Sohueil added. Guided by his experience in treating Israeli and Palestinian torture victims, Sohueil confirms that “the psychological effects of torture practiced by the Palestinians have a greater impact; consequently, they trigger daring reactions out of the victims’ desire for retaliation and revenge”.  The victims of torture justify the Israeli practices as being part of the practices of the occupying force; therefore, it is a source of pride. On the contrary, this is not the case when it comes to torture at the hands of their brothers".

In the midst of all this, the Palestinian Legislative Council’s lawmakers have been clinically dead for more than a year now; legal organizations confirm the absence of a body capable of pursuing the commitment of the executive authorities to eradicate political arrests, and the victims of political detention and torture have been insisting that retaliation and settlement of accounts is just a matter of time!