

## Israel closes case of prison officers filmed beating Palestinians

*Only four of 10 officers questioned, and none arrested after March 2019 incident at Ketziot Prison, Haaretz reports.*



Israeli police reportedly failed to identify all the officers despite the presence of the video footage

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Israel has closed a case that involved at least 10 Israeli officers who were filmed beating Palestinian inmates, according to an Israeli media report, in what has been described as one of the most violent incidents against prisoners in an Israeli jail.

Israeli daily Haaretz reported on Friday that only four officers were questioned and none was arrested after the incident on March 24, 2019, at Wing 3 of Ketziot Prison, where dozens of Hamas members were being held.

Footage showed about 55 Palestinian prisoners bent over on the floor and restrained, as Israeli officers punched, kicked and beat them with batons. The prisoners were ordered not to speak nor move for hours.

The Israel police unit investigating prison personnel said the official reason for the escalation was an “unknown offender”, before closing the investigation, Haaretz said.

According to the Israeli media, a Hamas member who was among the detainees had reportedly stabbed two officers, leaving one of them wounded, earlier that day.

At the time of the incident, the prison service had said in a statement that prison guards tried to restore order in the wing after riots broke out following the stabbings.

But the footage showed no riots. Instead, security camera footage showed security guards beating the prisoners without any provocation.

According to Amir Salum, a 26-year-old from Shofat, a Palestinian refugee camp in occupied East Jerusalem, who was serving a four-year sentence in Ketziot Prison at the time of the incident, the situation escalated without any reason.

“They decided to transfer us from Wing 4 to Wing 3,” Salum, who filed a complaint, told Haaretz.

“Suddenly, in the middle of the move, we heard someone shout ‘stabbing, stabbing!’ Within a few minutes, guards from the Masada [Israel Police Service] unit came in and started shooting these steel bullets at us. We then fled to the other side of the wing,” he said.

Another unit then entered and “put us in restraints and no one resisted, and then they simply began to beat us with batons”, Salum continued.

“They tossed us into the centre of the wing, like we were nothing, and beat us without us being able to defend ourselves.

“We were sure they were going to kill us,” he was quoted as saying by Haaretz.

“Everyone prayed to God. Only after seeing all the blood around me did one of the officers order that I be taken to the clinic. They beat me along the way, too,” Salum said.

Another prisoner, who also filed a complaint about the incident that night, described the events as “brutal, random violence by the guards, saying a guard beat him seven or eight times with an iron baton”, reported Haaretz.

Ali Da’ana, a Palestinian prisoner serving a 20-year sentence for attempted murder, said in his complaint that the guards waged a campaign of retaliation against the prisoner, according to the daily.

“I was beaten mercilessly by masked guards as I lay on the floor, for no reason,” he recalled. “It was revenge. I told one of them that I had a chronic illness and he said it didn’t matter. They kept hitting,” he said.

Israeli police reportedly failed to identify all the officers involved in the incident, despite the presence of the video footage.

According to Haaretz, police investigators said the security cameras were not enough to identify the officers in the prison wing that night.

The prisoners declared they could identify the perpetrators, but no further investigation was conducted.

Instead, only four officers were briefly questioned on suspicion of battery.

Albert Goldberg, a commander at Ketziot Prison, said a riot broke out in the wing following the alleged stabbing.

“It was decided to call backup to calm the situation ... To the best of my knowledge, there was controlled use of force to conduct the mission and there were no exceptions,” he told Haaretz.

Source: Al Jazeera