
April 17th: Palestinian Prisoners' Day

Free Ahmad Saadat and All Palestinian Political Prisoners

Palestinian Prisoners' Day, commemorated throughout Palestine and by solidarity activists the world over, April 17, is a day to bring attention to the plight of all Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli jails and to demand their immediate release.

This year, the day holds added significance because a top leader of the Palestinian resistance movement, Ahmad Saadat, is one of those prisoners. Because of Israeli and U.S. pressure, he is held in a Palestinian Authority (PA) jail.

Saadat is the General Secretary of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist organization that is the second largest political group within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). For over 35 years, Saadat and the PFLP have been at the forefront of the Palestinians' political and armed struggle for national liberation, the Right of Return and an end to the illegal Israeli military occupation of Palestine.

In January 2002, Saadat and four other PFLP members were arrested by the Palestinian Authority, at the bidding of the United States and Israel, for the assassination of Rehevam Ze'evi, the racist Israeli Minister of Tourism. Ze'evi openly advocated for the killing and exile of Palestinians. In exchange for lifting a military siege on Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's compound in April of 2002 (the 'Jericho Agreement'), the PA acceded to Israel's demand that the five men be transferred to a prison in Jericho, under Palestinian guardianship and the supervision of the U.S. and the British.

On June 3, 2002, the Palestinian Supreme Court ordered the release of Saadat, as he had never been charged or brought before a judge. Ra'anana Gissin, an Israeli spokesman, said that if "[Saadat] is not brought to justice, we will bring justice to him," and the next day, June 4, the Palestinian Authority decided that he should not be released, "due to Israeli threats of assassinating [him]."

A little over six months later, Saadat wrote an open letter to the Palestinian and Arab people, stating that his arrest was a "blatant violation of Palestinian law," and appealing to them to "demand the unconditional implementation of Palestinian national laws that prohibit polit-

ical arrests on the basis of conscience or resisting the Israeli occupation."

A week after Saadat's open letter, the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment noted the following, after visiting Saadat in prison, "The procedure to arrest Saadat was illegal. The Palestinian Supreme Court has emphasized the illegality of his arrest. He is the first high-ranking Palestinian politician to be arrested since the Palestinian Authority was established, and this poses a dangerous precedent for international involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and also a dangerous precedent for future agreements between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Saadat emphasized that he refuses to cooperate with international monitors sent to ensure his imprisonment, because he believes that the agreement made between the

Palestinian Authority and these international bodies is also entirely illegal, as was ruled by the Palestinian Supreme Court."

In an interview given to *Fight Back! Newspaper* in May of 2003, Saadat explained further the significance of his arrest, "The 'Jericho Agreement' is one of the demands that the PA

sees as commitments, which might be more important to Israel and the U.S. than the appointment of a prime minister or a new minister of finance or interior. Therefore, my release and the release of my four comrades require a solid Palestinian position that refuses to continually submit to American-supported, Israeli demands. [And when] the PA claims that we are being detained for our safety - this is utter nonsense used to justify the PA's compliance and submissiveness to Israeli security demands."

The arrest and continued imprisonment of Ahmad Saadat is a severe blow to the Palestinian resistance movement. Any commitments, especially the Jericho Agreement, which turn fighters into prisoners of the Americans and the Israelis should be rejected. The defense of liberation fighters starts with the protection of their internationally recognized right to resist the brutal Israeli military occupation, and the Palestinian Authority must not limit their ability to do so. ★

**Free Ahmad Saadat
and all Palestinian
political prisoners**