

The Actual Number Is Much Higher**Shin Bet Chief Urges Israel to Hold the Bodies of 1,700 Palestinians as Bargaining Chips**

Fact Sheet

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The Israeli occupation authorities are holding the bodies of hundreds of Palestinians — around 1,700 bodies — for bargaining purposes, despite the fact that there are currently no Israelis being held hostage by Palestinian organizations.

The head of Israel's internal security service, the Shin Bet, David Zini, argues that Israel should retain these bodies as bargaining chips in the event of future hostage-taking incidents. This position is also supported by the Israeli military.

The vast majority of the bodies belong to Palestinians who participated in the events of 7 October, but some belong to Palestinians who did not participate in the fighting. In addition, 13 bodies belong to Palestinian citizens holding Israeli citizenship by virtue of the existing political reality.

Legal experts argue that, in the absence of a decision by the Israeli government on the matter, the state has no authority to retain the bodies of Palestinians who did not participate in the fighting.

Previous decisions had linked the withholding of bodies to hostage negotiations.

In petitions submitted to the Supreme Court, the Shin Bet's legal adviser maintained that the state cannot retain bodies in cases where it has been determined that the individuals concerned did not participate in combat against Israel.

In February, Haaretz reported that Israel was holding identified remains belonging to 766 Palestinians and 10 foreign nationals, but sources said that the actual number is much higher.

It remains unclear how many of the bodies have been identified and how many belonged to Palestinians who lived in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The Israeli occupation authorities recently acknowledged, in several legal proceedings, that they are also holding the bodies of Palestinians who died while in Israeli detention.

In April, the State Prosecutor's Office began seeking opinions from defense and security agencies on the issue in preparation for a government decision.

The Israeli military informed the court that "special efforts" were underway to allow the release of some of the bodies, including those of individuals whose circumstances of death are being investigated by the military police.

According to data published by Haaretz, dozens of such investigations have been opened, but no indictments have been filed to date.

Missing Bodies

The bodies are being held in freezers at military facilities, but several security officials say that some have not been identified, while the whereabouts of other bodies are unknown.

Among these cases is that of Raj'a Samur, a 46-year-old Palestinian resident of Gaza.

When the war broke out, Samur, along with approximately 4,000 other Palestinians from Gaza, was placed in military detention facilities.

He was initially taken to Ofer Prison and later transferred to a facility at an Israeli military base in Anata.

After Samur, who suffered from diabetes, died in Anata, the military police opened an investigation.

His family petitioned the Supreme Court, demanding that his body be returned to them.

A body identified by the Military Rabbinate as Samur's was transferred to the National Institute of Forensic Medicine in Tel Aviv. However, the body was found to have gunshot wounds, whereas Samur had not been shot.

The Israeli military and the State Prosecutor's Office were subsequently forced to acknowledge that they did not know where Samur's body was.

In a rare step, and in coordination with the Israeli military and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a DNA sample was taken from Samur's brother, who lives in Gaza. Samples were later taken from Samur's children as well. Nevertheless, the Military Rabbinate has still been unable to locate his body.

The Israeli authorities acknowledged before the court that:

"The manner in which the deceased's body was handled by the relevant authorities raises a series of issues."

Another case is that of Alaa Subeih, 28, from the village of Tayasir in the Jordan Valley, who was shot dead by a soldier in April. According to the Israeli military, the soldier was on leave and was living in a nearby settlement outpost.

The Israeli military subsequently seized Subeih's body.

The End