

Urgent Appeal for the Release of Ms. Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh, the General Director for the Health Work Committees

Date: 19 July 2021

The Arbitrary Detention of Ms. Shatha Odeh Abu Fannouneh (Ms. Odeh hereafter)

Ms. Odeh, a 60-year-old mother of three, was forcibly and arbitrarily removed from her house in Ramallah, Palestine in the early hours on 7 July 2021. She has since been detained. Ms. Odeh is a nurse by profession and currently serves as the Director of the Health Work Committees (HWC). She is a women's health expert and has tirelessly worked during the COVID-19 pandemic to provide health services to Palestinian across the West Bank, Palestine.

On 7 July 2021, around 2:00 am, about 15 Israeli soldiers raided Ms. Odeh's house in 'Ain-Musbah, Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine, forcibly detaining her and terrorizing the family. The Israeli soldiers confiscated Ms. Odeh's mobile phone (that she uses for personal and professional communication), seized the keys of the organization's car, and confiscated the car itself. During the raid, other family members were kept in the living room while Ms. Odeh was allowed to get dressed. She was then taken, against her will, to 'Ofer' Israeli Military Camp in Ramallah. Ms. Odeh and her family were informed that she would be subjected to interrogation. No further explanation was provided. A 9-hour interrogation ensued on the day of her arrival.

Ms. Odeh's lawyers at the Addameer Organization, informed the family that she would be moved to Hasharon Prison that has a women's section. This prison is located south of the line extending between Tulkaram and Netanya, outside the occupied Palestinian territory in violation of international humanitarian law. Family members are thus unable to reach Ms. Odeh because travel to Hasharon Prison requires security permits to be issued by the Israeli authorities. Ms. Odeh is currently being held in the women's section at Hasharon Prison. Ms. Odeh was allowed to make two phone calls (on 7 and 12 July) to a lawyer but not to be formally assisted during interrogations nor to consult with them privately and in person. The interrogation takes place in 'Ofer' Military Camp in Ramallah, which is over an hour drive from Hasharon Prison.

The Military Court Hearings

- i. On 8 July, Ms. Odeh attended her first military court hearing, where the court extended her detention until 14 July 2021, citing a need for further investigation.
- ii. On 14 July, Ms. Odeh's second hearing took place. The military court extended her detention to 19 July 2021 to finish the investigation and to translate the case files.
- iii. On 19 July 2021, the third hearing of Ms. Odeh took place. The Prosecution requested eight days to prepare the list of charges. The military judge ordered an extension of detention to Monday, 26 July (the fourth hearing). It is worth noting that representatives from the European Union, the British Support Team and Diakonia were present at this hearing.

Observations

- i. Ms. Odeh's health is extremely compromised, her condition is critical. She is diagnosed with numerous chronic illnesses including Hypertension, Hyperlipidaemia, Diabetes Mellitus, and Irritable Bowel Syndrome. She is currently prescribed a vast array of medications. The lawyer informed the family that the Israeli Prison authorities denied Ms. Odeh's request to have access to one of her medications (Creon 10,000 IU capsule (1 per day)) up until 15 July 2021, only after the lawyer presented a report explaining why this medication is important to her. **While detained, Ms. Odeh is considered to be at a high risk and needs continuous observation and monitoring. She will not endure her arbitrary detention. (Please refer to the annexed medical certificate of 7 July 2021).**
- ii. It is worth of note, that up until the third hearing Ms. Odeh was not allowed to have underclothing or clothes to change. Ms. Odeh appeared to the hearings with the same clothes during her arrest on 7 July. The Israeli authorities rejected to let in clothes to Ms. Odeh twice and informed lawyers that only first family members or lawyers registered in a military court order are allowed to bring clothes to detainees. This piece of information is not common knowledge. Also, the first family members cannot visit Hasharon Prison to bring clothes without permits issued by Israeli authorities. During the hearing of 14 July, Ms. Odeh's lawyer made sure to request for a court order to let one of the lawyers visit the Prison to bring the clothes to Ms. Odeh. The lawyer brought the clothes to the Hasharon Prison on the same day of the hearing, however, the Israeli Prison authorities did not handover the clothes to Ms. Odeh claiming that they need to disinfect them. In the hearing of 19 July, Ms. Odeh attended the hearing still with the same clothes from her arrest 12 days ago. In all hearings Ms. Odeh expressed her agitation and frustration of the clothes situation. In this regard, Ms. Odeh's lawyer requested that the judge recommends to the Israeli Prison authorities to handover the clothes to Ms. Odeh (the military judge does not have authority over the prisons), to which the judge agreed.
- iii. During the third hearing, Ms. Odeh's lawyer requested that the judge recommends to the Israeli Prison authorities to transfer Ms. Odeh to Damoun Female Prison in Haifa. (The military judge does not have authority over the prisons), to which the judge agreed.
- iv. It is worth of note, the hearings were less than 15 minutes, and they were all conducted in Hebrew, a language that neither Ms. Odeh nor her family members understand.
- v. Only one family member is allowed to the hearings, allegedly on the basis of COVID-19 measures. On the first hearing, Ms. Odeh's husband attended the hearing with one of their daughters who was exceptionally permitted to attend the hearing by the military judge. On the second hearing, one of Ms. Odeh's daughters was present with Ms. Odeh's son who was exceptionally permitted to attend the hearing by the military judge. On the third hearing, only the husband was permitted inside the court.
- vi. No close or physical interactions between Ms. Odeh and her family members were permitted during the arrest or at any of the three hearings.

The Raid on HWC Office

The HWC is a leading prominent health organization that promotes Palestinians right to health and provides cheap (almost free) and quality health services to Palestinians across the West Bank, especially in remote areas. The HWC has been working tirelessly during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that all Palestinians have access to health services.

On 9 June 2021, Israeli forces raided HWC's office in Ramallah, confiscated its computers and vandalized its premises. They additionally fixed a military order on the outside door after sealing it, closing the organization for six months on the basis of 'security reasons' without providing further details. This was the fourth raid on the organization's office since 2019.

Recommendations

In light of the above, our family urges you to intervene immediately, and specifically to:

- i. Call on the Occupying Power, Israel, to immediately release Palestinian detainee Ms. Odeh, whose health is compromised, and guarantee her right to liberty and freedom from arbitrary arrests and detention;
- ii. Call on Israel to ensure and uphold Palestinian detainee Ms. Odeh's right to the highest attainable standard of health and mental health, as well as the right to life; and
- iii. Call on Israel to put an end to the systematic and ongoing practice of targeting of Palestinian civil society organizations, including HWC and intimidating Palestinian human rights defenders, including Ms. Odeh, contrary to international law.

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