Administrative Detention: Palestinians Jailed Without Charge or Trial



Administrative detention is an Israeli policy that jails Palestinians without charge or trial, by order of a military commander, on the basis of a "secret" file that neither the detainee nor their lawyer may see, for up to six months renewable without limit. In September 2026 there were 3,176 administrative detainees in occupation prisons. [1] [2] [3]

The occupation has used this policy since occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, and prisoners' organisations describe it as a means of collective punishment against Palestinians who reject the occupation. [4] [5]

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Administrative detention at a glance

Item	Details
Definition	Detention without charge or trial, by order of a military commander on intelligence advice, based on “secret” material [1] [2]
Legal basis	Article 285 of Military Order 1651, rooted in the British Emergency Regulations of 1945 [2] [1]
Duration	Up to six months per order, renewable without limit [1] [5]
Current detainees	3,176 administrative detainees out of about 9,350 prisoners (September 2026) [3]
Since 1967	Over 50,000 cases of administrative detention up to 2014 [1] [4]
International law	The Fourth Geneva Convention allows internment only “for imperative reasons of security,” never as punishment [5] [2]

What is administrative detention?

Human rights organisations working on prisoners define administrative detention as the detention of a person by order of military commanders, on intelligence advice, after gathering material classified as “secret.” Neither the detainee nor their lawyer is told the charge or the evidence. [1]

Administrative detention orders were at first issued under the Defence (Emergency) Regulations enacted by the British Mandate in 1945. [1] Today in the

West Bank they rest on Article 285 of Military Order 1651, which allows a military commander to detain a person for periods of up to six months, renewable without limit, if he has “reasonable grounds” to believe that “the security of the area” requires it. [5] [2]

The secret file and the token court

The order is subject to judicial review within eight days, but the military judge approves it without reading all the secret material and without examining the information’s authenticity. [2] Detainees are told there is “secret evidence” against them and that they are held “for security reasons,” so neither they nor their lawyers can defend against a charge they do not know. [2]

Under international law

Article 78 of the Fourth Geneva Convention allows an occupying power to intern people only “for imperative reasons of security,” and Addameer stresses that this is an exceptional measure that must not be used as punishment. [5] International law requires administrative detention to be a last resort with no alternative, and to respect the guarantees of Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. [2]

But the occupation has turned the exception into the rule: thousands of orders a year, endless renewals, and the transfer of detainees from the occupied territory to prisons inside the occupying state, which Addameer describes as the “forced transfer” of the occupied population. [2]

In numbers: from 1967 to today

Period	Administrative detention
First Intifada (1987–1994)	About 19,000 administrative detention orders [1] [4]
Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000–2007)	Nearly 18,000 orders [1] [4]

Period	Administrative detention
October 2002	Over 1,050 administrative detainees [5]
1967 to 2014	Over 50,000 cases of administrative detention, out of about 805,000 arrests [1]
2022	2,409 orders and about 850 administrative detainees, the highest in over 10 years [4]
June 2025	3,562 administrative detainees, including 95 children; 600 orders in two weeks [6]
September 2026	3,176 administrative detainees out of about 9,350 prisoners [3]

The number of administrative detainees multiplies during uprisings. Since the start of the genocidal war on Gaza, the occupation has issued thousands of orders, until the number of administrative detainees reached more than four times its 2022 level. [6] [4]

Collective punishment

Addameer states that administrative detention "has been used as a means of collective punishment for Palestinians who oppose the occupation." [5] No one is spared: in July 2016 the administrative detainees included 3 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, 2 women and 8 children, [5] and in June 2025 they included 95 children. [6]

Hunger strikes and force-feeding

Palestinian prisoners have resorted to hunger strikes since 1968 as a legitimate peaceful protest against detention policies. [2] In 2022 alone, 75 prisoners went on hunger strike, most of them against administrative detention; the longest, by Khalil Awawdeh, lasted 172 days. [4]

In response to the strikes, on 30 July 2015 the Knesset passed a law proposed by Israeli Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan allowing the force-feeding of hunger-striking prisoners. [2]

Conclusion

In administrative detention there is no charge, no trial, no evidence that can be answered, and no release date. Six months are renewed and renewed again, until Palestinians spend years of their lives behind bars without knowing why. A measure meant to be an exception has become an everyday tool for punishing an entire people.

Frequently asked questions about administrative detention

What is administrative detention?

Detention without charge or trial, by military order based on a secret file that neither the detainee nor their lawyer may see.

How long does administrative detention last?

Up to six months per order, renewable an unlimited number of times.

How many administrative detainees are there today?

3,176 at the start of September 2026, out of about 9,350 prisoners in occupation prisons.

Is administrative detention legal?

International law allows it only exceptionally, “for imperative reasons of security,” and never as punishment, as the occupation uses it.

What is force-feeding?

Feeding a hunger-striking prisoner against their will; the Knesset passed a law allowing it on 30 July 2015.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Administrative Detention,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 9 August 2015.
2. Addameer, “Administrative Detention Fact Sheet,” 2022.
3. “Number of Prisoners in Occupation Prisons in 2026,” Palestinian National Information Centre (WAFA).
4. “Administrative Detention: A Systematic Israeli Policy Denying Palestinians the Reason for Their Arrest,” Al Jazeera Net, 2 May 2023.
5. Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, “Administrative Detention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: A Legal Analysis Report,” 4th edition, 2016.
6. “Israel Issues 600 Administrative Detention Orders in Two Weeks,” Al Jazeera Net (via Anadolu), 25 June 2025.