

## **Report**

### **Israeli Military Arrests H4P Health Worker**

#### **Mahmoud Mashayikh, Community Health Worker, Health for Palestine (H4P), Arrested and Detained**

**16 May 2024**

Israeli occupation forces arrested community health worker Mahmoud Mashayikh, 33 years old, from his home in the UN-run Aida refugee camp, Bethlehem, West Bank. The arrest took place in the pre-dawn hours of Thursday, May 9, 2024. The forces broke precious items in his home as they searched for, among other things, his cellphone. Mahmoud has been a member of the Lajee Center and 1for3 teams since 2018, the inception of the community health program run by Health for Palestine (H4P). He is also part of the Lajee Center's environment unit and 1for3's food program as he oversees the rooftop hydroponic gardens. They provide produce for patients in the community health program and for the wider community. His arrest is felt profoundly by Lajee Center employees, his patients, and the global teams of 1for3 and H4P. This action is part of a much broader violent campaign of Israeli mass incarceration in this time of genocide.

As a community health worker, Mahmoud is an excellent caregiver, someone committed to professional development. Aya Darwish, the coordinator of the health & environment unit at Lajee since 2019, recognized Mahmoud's talent at treating people with diabetes and hypertension. "The passion of Mahmoud is practicing nursing," she said. "He likes to do it, and he is good at it." To this end, having already earned a two-year degree in nursing, he had returned to his studies this year for a four-year program in nursing to further develop his skills. His colleague Nina Abu Salem said, "Mahmoud is always supportive, whether the circumstances are sweet or difficult. He is ambitious and loves his work, and he does it with excellence." Dr. Henry Louis, international medical director for Health for Palestine, also remarked on Mahmoud's ambition, saying, "Mahmoud has excelled in growth, the ability to adapt and change in meaningful ways over years of hard work both for his community and himself."

Dr. Bram Wispelwey, co-founder and Chief Strategist of Health for Palestine, emphasized Mahmoud's centrality to the program and his capacity for mentorship, commenting, "Mahmoud is the rock of our community health worker program. Dedicated and empathetic, he's been with H4P through every moment as a CHW from our original training cohort. He's now a leader to whom new CHWs look for guidance." Mahmoud was planning to travel to Armenia with other members of the 1for3 team in June 2024 for further training.

Mahmoud is well-loved by his patients, especially because he always walks in with a smile. In an interview after Mahmoud's arrest, his patient Jalila Al-Azraq, a community elder who lived through the Nakba, recited the poetry with which she routinely greets him when he comes to visit her. She recounted that they always joke with each other about a wide variety of topics.

Like many team members, Mahmoud dedicates himself not only to his immediate tasks but also to broader support for the organization and the community. Nidal Al-Azraq, executive director of 1for3, said, “You can find Mahmoud at all of the programs at the Lajee Center. Whenever there is an activity, a summer camp, a festival, a community gathering, you will see Mahmoud there.”

Israel has used widespread arrests in the last seven months for its political ends. [One in every five](#) Palestinians has been arrested and detained at some point in their lives, but Israeli arrest raids have caught thousands in their webs in the last seven months, when the number of prisoners has climbed to the largest since at least 2008. The number of those being held without charge under administrative detention has [almost tripled](#) from 1,319 at the beginning of October to 3,661 in April 2024. The number of people from Aida camp in Israeli prisons has more than doubled in these months, with most being held under administrative detention.

Mahmoud’s family, friends, and colleagues now worry about the horrors he is experiencing. Conditions in prison have become increasingly dire in recent months. At least 16 prisoners have [died](#) in the Israeli prison system from Oct. 7, 2023, to April 22, 2024, not including those detained in Gaza outside of the formal prison system, and “[brutal](#) and degrading” treatment is rampant. As of March 7, at least 30 Gazan detainees have died in [Israeli military facilities](#). Prisoners face intensified beatings and other forms of torture, severe shortages of food, overcrowding, and a lack of health care.

Nidal Al-Azraq emphasized this point, saying, “What shocks and worries the community at the Lajee Center is the treatment now for Palestinian prisoners. The starvation and humiliation are unbearable. This is why when people think of Mahmoud’s arrest, like those of others from Aida Camp, they think of the torture that he is going to go through.” Said Nina Abu Salem, in his absence, “I see him everywhere in the center,” but she knows, “he is able to face the challenges in front of him and God is with him.” Aya Darwish captured the feelings of many when she said, Mahmoud “is all the time laughing and smiling as he is working, and because of this we need him to be free.”