**Palestinian Return Centre**

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**Why have we ignored the plight of Palestine’s Bobby Sands?**

Khader\_AdnanWe honour the memory of many men who took up armed struggle and died on hunger strike for their beliefs. So what makes Khader Adnan any different?

Maali, daughter of Palestinian prisoner Khader Adnan, takes part in a demonstration in support of her father. Photograph: Getty Images."His calls for freedom deserve to be heard. His valiant efforts should not go in vain. The president calls on all supporters of human rights and freedom, and the United Nations, to take up [his] case." Those were the laudable words of the White House press secretary, commenting on the hunger strike of the Iranian dissident and detainee Akbar Ganji in 2005.

Seven years later, the White House has issued no such statement on Khader Adnan, the detained Palestinian father-of-two who decided to end his remarkable 66-day hunger strike on 21 February as doctors warned he was "in immediate danger of death". Perhaps, just perhaps, the US is silent because his jailers are Israelis, not Iranians. Adnan is being held under Israel's "administrative detention" laws - inherited from the British Mandate era - which allow the military to detain prisoners indefinitely, without charging them or making them stand trial.

The 34-year-old baker from Jenin, who is accused by Israel of being a member of the militant group Islamic Jihad and of undefined "activities that threaten regional security", began his hunger strike on 18 December 2011 - the day after he was detained. He protests against what he says was a violent arrest as well as humiliating and abusive interrogation sessions.

His was the longest hunger strike yet by a Palestinian prisoner - and on 21 February it forced the Israeli authorities to agree not to renew his four-month administrative detention when it expires on 17 April. Yet this "deal" might be coming too late for him: on 17 February, the Israeli branch of Physicians for Human Rights said he had already suffered from "significant muscular atrophy" and was near death. His pregnant wife, Randa, who visited him in hospital, told Reuters that he had lost 35 kilos in weight and had started to vomit blood. It isn't easy to survive after starving for nine weeks.

Without trialSo why did he take such extreme action? "I have been humiliated, beaten and harassed by interrogators for no reason, and thus I swore to God I would fight the policy of administrative detention to which I and hundreds of my fellow prisoners fell prey," Adnan wrote in a letter from his hospital bed. There are 309 Palestinians being held under administrative detention by Israel - up from 219 in 2011 - including 24 Palestinian parliamentarians and one man who has been detained without trial for more than two years.

Will Adnan's bold, if near-suicidal strategy help draw attention to their fate, within Israel and beyond? "It's more important to talk about the issue of administrative detention than his hunger strike," a frustrated Anat Litvin, head of the detainees department at Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, told me.

As is so often the case, international law is not on the side of the Israelis. Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) - to which the State of Israel is a signatory - makes clear that no person should be "subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention". The ICCPR allows for governments, in narrow and extreme circumstances, to derogate from this obligation temporarily, yet, as Litvin notes, "Israel uses it on a regular basis".

In fact, the UN's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has condemned Israel's use of long-term administrative detention - in particular, those cases, like Adnan's, in which detainees are held without trial merely for belonging to an "illegal organisation".

Here in the west, however, we have abandoned any moral high ground we may have occupied. The last Labour government inter­ned terror suspects without trial in Belmarsh between 2001 and 2004; the current coalition government's Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures allow for indefinite house arrest without charge. In the US, President Obama has signed into law the National Defence Authorisation Act, which permits the indefinite detention in military custody of terror suspects. Habeas corpus has been consigned to the history books.

Shameful silenceMeanwhile, the British media, including the BBC, have been shamefully silent on Adnan's plight. As of 21 February, his detention and hunger strike had been ignored by every single UK newspaper, bar the Guardian and the Independent, which ran a handful of pieces. The latter's Donald Macintyre devoted a full-page, 1,100-word report to Adnan's story, headlined "The West Bank's Bobby Sands" - a reference to the 27-year-old IRA prisoner who died in 1981 after 66 days on hunger strike.

It is an apt analogy. "To us, Khader Adnan just brings back memories of what we went through," Danny Morrison, spokesman for the Bobby Sands Trust, tells me. "The parallels are there for all to see." To Morrison, who was also interned in Northern Ireland, Adnan, like Sands, is driven by "the call of justice". He adds: "This man wants to live but what else can he do? He doesn't have any weapons to fight with so he fights with his own body."

“Where, one wonders, is the Palestinian Gandhi?" I asked on these pages in 2009. Perhaps he has arrived, in the unlikely guise of an Islamic Jihad activist. Some senior Israeli figures fear that Adnan's defiant - and effective - actions will inspire other Palestinians, frustrated by the political failures of Fatah and the military failures of Hamas, to engage in non-violent, Gandhi-style protests, both inside and outside Israel's prisons. As with all occupiers and oppressors throughout history, the Israelis are fighting a losing battle. Terence MacSwiney was an Irish republican activist and lord mayor of Cork who was imprisoned by the British in August 1920 and died the following October after 74 days on hunger strike. As MacSwiney once remarked: "It is not those who can inflict the most, but those who can suffer the most, who will conquer in the end."