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‘My Family, My People’: How Khader Adnan

Unified Palestinians from His Prison Cell



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Khader Adnan was not a ‘terrorist’ with ‘Israeli blood on his hands,’ as pro-Israeli propagandists have been repeating in the news and on social media.

If the former Palestinian prisoner, who died in his Israeli prison cell following 87 days of an uninterrupted hunger strike was, indeed, directly involved in armed resistance, the story would have had a completely different ending.

Armed Palestinian resisters are either assassinated or detained and tried by Israeli military courts to spend prolonged sentences in Israeli prisons, following brief trials that lack any fairness or due process.

Adnan was a charismatic leader, but not an actual fighter by the strict definition of the word. He inspired Palestinians from his humble home in the village of Arraba, southwest of Jenin which, along with Nablus, is the home of Palestine's toughest resistance.

Adnan had a math degree from the University of Bir Zeit, graduating in 2001. Due to repeated arrests by Israeli occupation forces, Adnan, then a young man in his early 20s, was denied the opportunity to pursue his Master's Degree from the same university in the West Bank.

Adnan was also denied the opportunity to work in his field so, instead, he worked in a local bakery in Arraba, and eventually established his own small bakery in the nearby village of Qabatiya. But Adnan has done more than feed his community with bread. He also inspired them.

It was this very quality that put him on a crash course, not only with the Israeli occupation, but also with the Palestinian Authority.

Adnan's first arrest by Israel was in 1999, when the young student was held for four consecutive months. Since then, he has been arrested at least 12 times, and spent over eight years in prison. On six different occasions, he carried out hunger strikes, the shortest of which lasted for 25 days and the longest for 87. The latter was his longest, and his last.

Expectedly, Adnan was an agent provocateur by the standards of the Palestinian security apparatus, as well. In 1999, he was arrested and interrogated by PA security forces for leading a student protest against the then-French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin.

During his speech at Bir Zeit University, Jospin lashed out at Palestinian and Arab Resistance. To his surprise, a skinny, young student in the audience protested, hailing the Resistance while speaking out against Western duplicity. Shortly afterwards, the French leader was escorted out of the university as angry students pelted him with rocks and shoes.

That was the real danger, and power of Adnan who, despite repeated Israeli attempts to charge him for supposed 'terrorist' activities, could only hold him for prolonged periods under the so-called Administrative Detention – a law designed to silence Palestinian academics, intellectuals and activists who play leadership roles in their own communities.

Adnan, however, could not be silenced.

Unlike previous arrests by Israel, Adnan's latest arrest on February 5 was different. Israel, this time around, wanted to charge him with incitement to violence and membership in an

illegal organization. An accusation of this nature would ensure the outspoken man would spend more than five years in prison.

But why now?

A brewing armed rebellion in the West Bank, particularly in the northern regions where Adnan had much moral authority and influence, meant that the man's freedom could prove costly for Israel. While armed Palestinian fighters are being killed by Israel at a high rate in Nablus, Jenin, Jericho, Bethlehem and Hebron, the rebellious political leadership is also being sidelined through arbitrary detentions and drummed-up accusations.

Indeed, a new leadership has been sprouting throughout the Occupied Territories, offering an alternative, not only to the PA, but also to the factional leaderships that seem to operate exclusively around party lines. Though Adnan was affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), he was a member of the new non-factional political movement that sought common grounds among all Palestinians, regardless of geography, politics and ideology.

From the Israeli viewpoint, releasing Adnan would have set a precedent – the same way that Adnan had forced Israel to set a precedent when he weaponized hunger strikes to gain his freedom years ago, and several times since.

Also, Israel did not want Adnan back on the streets, leading mass protests against the Israeli occupation, speaking of resistance and protesting those who collaborated with the Israeli military.

So, they simply allowed him to die. In an interview, Adnan's wife, Randa Mousa, told the *Palestine Chronicle* that “On one occasion (80 days into her husband's latest hunger strike), he lost consciousness inside his cell, which was full of surveillance cameras. The Israeli guards only tried to save him after thirty minutes”.

In fact, he died alone with no medical attention, to be discovered a lifeless body inside his prison cell by the Israeli prison guards, sometime later.

Shortly after the announcement of Adnan's death, Palestinians from all resistance groups in Gaza fired rockets towards Israel, mass protests broke out in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and a general strike was declared. The young Bir Zeit student had grown to become the most unifying figure in Palestine, even after his death.

In his will, Adnan addressed his people as one, without a single reference to factional line or language. He praised the ‘revolutionaries’, and spoke of the assured victory. The references he made to his wife, children, parents, aunties and uncles were interwoven with references to all Palestinians, everywhere, as if he was saying that all Palestinians are one single family.

Despite the potential heavy price of Adnan's death, for Israel, such Palestinians represent a real danger. They are often poor, humble, community-based, yet unifying figures who challenge a political discourse that has been at work since the signing of the Oslo Accords; a process that divided Palestinians into classes, turning brothers into enemies, and allowing Israel to maintain its military occupation and apartheid, unhindered.

Khader Adnan, however, was not the originator of this new thinking, but himself an outcome of a whole new political culture, which has permeated Palestine for years; a mode of collective resistance that cannot be easily crushed, silenced or killed. His death, though tragic, is likely to contribute to the emerging discourse among Palestinians, that of unity, popular resistance and, indeed, the hope of an "assured victory".

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