

Control and Humiliation at the Allenby Bridge: An Interview with Helmi Al-Araj





Read the interview in Arabic

The Allenby Bridge crossing, also known as the King Hussein Bridge, is supposed to serve as a lifeline for Palestinians. In practice, however, it has become a gateway to daily humiliation and a relentless test of human dignity. It is no longer merely a crossing point between two banks, but rather a space marked by long waits, degrading inspections, and continuous psychological pressure, all under limited operating hours and harsh procedures that make crossing it an almost impossible ordeal.

In this context, Noon Post conducted an exclusive interview with Helmi Al-Araj, Director of the Center for Defense of Liberties, to unpack the grim reality at the Allenby Bridge. According to Al-Araj, the bridge is no longer just a security or administrative measure, but a systematic tool in the hands of the occupation to humiliate Palestinians and restrict their basic rights and freedom of movement, while the world watches passively, taking no real steps toward accountability or the protection of human dignity.

As Al-Araj explains, the daily suffering at the crossing goes far beyond bureaucratic mismanagement or temporary restrictions. It reflects a deliberate policy aimed at breaking the Palestinian individual turning them into a captive of every decision made by the occupation regime.

How do you explain the persistent suffering at the Allenby Bridge, despite it

having functioned as a civilian crossing for decades?

This ongoing suffering, which has persisted for decades, can be explained by the presence of the occupation and its policies that aim to impose collective punishment explicitly prohibited under international law on the Palestinian people. These policies harm the dignity of men, women, children, the elderly, and the sick alike.

Travelers are subjected to humiliating searches, including strip searches, and are treated inhumanely, often being detained for hours under the pretext of security checks.

Crossing the Allenby Bridge has always been a journey of agony, humiliation, and abuse of human dignity. In recent times particularly since October 7 the suffering has worsened. The occupation has drastically reduced the working days and hours of the crossing, rendering it incapable of handling the flow of Palestinian travelers. Notably, this bridge is the only exit point to the outside world for these citizens.

Limiting the bridge's working hours under intense and complex security procedures is a deliberate attempt to degrade Palestinian dignity. The occupation justifies these policies by claiming full sovereignty over the crossing while denying the Palestinian Authority any such authority an attempt not only to erase Palestinian dignity but to deny the very existence of the Palestinian people.

All of this unfolds before the eyes and ears of the world, in full view of diplomatic missions, which are fully aware of what's happening. Yet, they remain inactive, worsening the suffering. The hardship becomes even more severe during holidays, religious occasions, and travel seasons such as Hajj, Umrah, Christmas, and school breaks, when thousands of travelers face delays that force them to wait for days, both entering and exiting, around the clock.

This is a result of the occupation's insistence on imposing collective punishment to the fullest extent. The decision to open the bridge—or not—is entirely in the hands of the occupying power. Like all land crossings, it could be opened 24/7, yet they choose not to.

To what extent is the Allenby Bridge used as a tool for collective punishment rather than a mere security measure?

The Allenby Bridge is indeed used as a tool for collective punishment par excellence. The hardship it imposes amounts to clear economic depletion. Travel costs are extremely high Palestinians leave their homeland under occupation and pay exorbitant travel fees and taxes. For families, these costs multiply, becoming burdensome and exhausting.

Beyond the financial aspect, there is the degradation of human dignity through convoluted security checks, humiliating searches, and harsh treatment, compounded by long hours of waiting in both summer and winter. Overcrowding only intensifies the suffering, leading to serious psychological and physical effects. Nerves are frayed, time is wasted, money is drained, and daily hardship increases.

The occupation controls every detail of travel. Many travelers have pre-booked flights, job interviews, medical appointments, or religious obligations, all of which are jeopardized by the reduced operating hours of the crossing.

This problem is especially severe on Fridays and Saturdays, when hours are cut to a minimum. As a result, Palestinians are forced to bear extra costs. Instead of heading directly to the airport, they must travel to Amman and stay in hotels for one or two nights.

For instance, someone traveling on a Thursday may have to stay through Friday and Saturday just to catch their flight on Sunday an enormous financial burden and added suffering.

Under these conditions, travelers are in a constant state of anxiety: Will they be allowed to cross? Will their trip be blocked? Add to this the Israeli policy of “security bans,” often used as a form of collective punishment. Citizens are prevented from traveling under vague “security reasons” without legal justification or explanation.

Legally speaking, how can the practice of denying travel without clear reasons be evaluated?

Legally, the practice of denying or turning back travelers without providing clear reasons constitutes a blatant violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, especially the right to freedom of movement. It doesn't just violate that one right it impacts a whole set of fundamental civil rights.

For Palestinians under occupation, travel is not a luxury or a secondary option. It is often essential for employment, education, or medical treatment especially given the occupation's restrictions on access to East Jerusalem or cities inside Israel. Many are denied access to hospitals such as Hadassah and at the same time are barred from traveling abroad for treatment, threatening their rights to health and life.

The right to work is sacred and enshrined in national constitutions and international human rights instruments, particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every person has an inherent right to life, work, liberty, and

movement.

When these rights are revoked through arbitrary administrative decisions without judicial process or clear legal grounds it causes immense harm to individuals, their families, and society as a whole.

If the traveler is ill, they're denied treatment. If they're a student, they're deprived of education. If a graduate, they're blocked from work. If devout, they're denied the right to pilgrimage. And if they have family abroad in the US, Europe, the Gulf, or Jordan they're cut off, violating their right to family life.

This is not merely about denying an individual's right to travel; it causes widespread harm to families, society, and the economy, while inflicting deep psychological and emotional pain making it a form of collective punishment prohibited under international human rights law.

In your view, what are the responsibilities of the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian Authority, and the Jordanian side in improving travel conditions at the bridge? Who bears the greatest burden?

While administrative shortcomings on the part of the Palestinian Authority or the Jordanian administration are real and must be addressed, they pale in comparison to the core issue: the occupation's control over the crossing and its deliberate reduction of working hours.

The root solution lies in opening the bridge 24 hours a day. Even if Palestinian and Jordanian bureaucracy persists, it is bearable compared to the daily repression and blatant violations by the occupation.

Restricting travel to only a few hours a day exacerbates the crisis and renders administrative reforms marginal. Still, administrative and organizational measures by the PA and Jordan are essential especially to curb corruption, prevent exploitation, and eliminate extortion practices like the so-called "VIP services."

The Palestinian Authority must facilitate the flow of travelers in both directions. This is a basic duty, as is the role of the Jordanian side in achieving the same goal. Nonetheless, the PA holds the greater responsibility as the primary authority engaging directly with Jordan. Any lapse intentional or not comes at a steep cost and risks turning public frustration against both the PA and Jordan, which benefits no one.

We need a positive, constructive, and sincere relationship between the Palestinian and Jordanian people and governments. This historic relationship must be protected from exploitation by private companies operating in the name of either side.

These are profit-driven entities that exploit citizens without regard for their humanity a reality that must be recognized and addressed by the Jordanian authorities immediately and seriously.

Administrative measures should aim to simplify crossing procedures organizing terminals, increasing staff, extending hours, and speeding up passport control. Although the occupation bears primary responsibility, the crisis touches every Palestinian household, and no side PA or Jordan can afford to neglect its part.

Each party knows its responsibilities. Through cooperation, the PA and Jordan can present practical proposals to ease Palestinian suffering at the Allenby Bridge while keeping full accountability where it belongs: with the Israeli occupation.

From your work at the Hurryyat Center, what are the most serious legal and human rights violations Palestinians face at the bridge?

The most severe and dangerous violations, as we at Hurryyat observe, involve the systematic and deliberate denial of Palestinians' right to freedom of movement a right clearly protected under international humanitarian law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and human rights treaties like the ICCPR.

When this right is violated in all its forms, it reveals a pattern of premeditated human rights abuse by Israel, flagrantly breaching international law. Denying Palestinians their freedom of movement has a cascading effect, undermining their rights to work, worship, education, medical care, and family life all of which become inaccessible.

Moreover, the occupation worsens travelers' suffering and directly undermines human dignity through humiliation and degrading treatment at the crossing. When such behavior is deliberate and comes from an official authority as is the case with the occupation it legally amounts to both psychological and physical torture.

Keeping patients for hours at the crossing, detaining pregnant women, children, and the elderly in harsh conditions and under the burning sun this constitutes torture and inhumane, degrading treatment. When carried out intentionally by a state authority, this behavior falls squarely within the legal definition of torture under the Convention Against Torture.

That convention explicitly states that cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment based on discrimination—and committed by an official body is considered torture, whether it takes place on the street, at checkpoints, at detention centers, or at crossings. Legally and morally, the Allenby Bridge is no exception.

What's happening at the bridge cannot be dismissed as routine security or

administrative measures. It is a systematic pattern of grave violations that amount to crimes that do not expire and strike directly at fundamental human rights and dignity.

How do the long waits and harsh inspection procedures affect the most vulnerable groups among Palestinian travelers compared to others?

In reality, even young, healthy Palestinians suffer tremendously when forced to spend an entire day whether departing or returning at the Allenby Bridge. This wasted time is stolen from their lives, draining their energy and spirit while inflicting constant psychological strain in a context of targeted discrimination against Palestinians. Meanwhile, Israeli Jewish citizens travel freely through airports without facing such ordeals, prompting a legitimate question: Is there anywhere else in the world where such suffering occurs?

The answer is clear: it stems from the occupation and its deliberate policies, executed through political decisions. The suffering experienced by all Palestinian travelers is acute, but it becomes especially unbearable for the most vulnerable patients, children, the elderly, and women, particularly pregnant women.

Extended waiting times, extreme overcrowding, and persistent anxiety over whether one will even be allowed to cross whether heading in or out place travelers in a state of constant nervous tension. Palestinians are left wondering: will I make it today? Will I be turned back? Will I miss my appointment, treatment, or flight?

For vulnerable groups, this ordeal becomes not just psychological but physical. It poses real threats to their well-being, magnifying their suffering and turning travel itself into a harsh experience that directly undermines their human dignity.

Are the restrictions imposed on the Allenby Bridge used as a political and security tool that intensifies during periods of tension? How does this impact Palestinian life?

Yes, there is a clear and consistent pattern of tightened restrictions at the Allenby Bridge during periods of political or security tension. Often, the occupation enforces full closures of the West Bank or even specific governorates for extended periods. We saw this during the First and Second Intifadas, in 2014, and most dramatically following October 7, when sweeping, punitive restrictions were imposed on Palestinians.

Since October 7, suffering has escalated significantly, with harsher security protocols, more degrading treatment, and severe limitations on the bridge's working hours. It's become evident that the crossing is used by the occupation as a weapon to collectively punish Palestinians, enforce economic siege, and strip

them of their basic civil rights particularly their right to movement, employment, medical care, education, pilgrimage, and family unification.

This suffering is not momentary, incidental, or temporary it is a continuous reality that has persisted since the beginning of the occupation in 1967. It intensifies according to political or security events that the occupation uses as justification for escalation. Often, the occupation fabricates these pretexts to exert additional control.

We see this clearly at checkpoints as well as at the bridge: thousands of cars may wait for hours, with no soldiers present only for the barrier to suddenly open with no apparent change in security conditions. What changed?

Nothing but the decision. That decision itself is deeply rooted in racism and collective punishment. Its purpose is to humiliate people, keep them waiting endlessly, and then casually allow the next group through as if the hours of suffering endured by those before them mean nothing.

This strategy is designed to psychologically break the Palestinian individual to trap them in a cycle of checkpoints and bridges that dominate their daily existence. It prevents them from dreaming of freedom, independence, or even earning a basic livelihood. A Palestinian's day begins and ends with one question: "How are the checkpoints today?" Is the road open or closed? Why? And the answer is always the same: "Because this is occupation."

Beyond all individual acts, the occupation itself is the greatest ongoing crime in modern history. It takes many forms, and after imprisonment, shootings, killings, and assassinations, the daily suffering at checkpoints and bridges remains one of its most damaging expressions. They are two sides of the same coin: collective punishment, domination, and the erosion of Palestinian human dignity.

Why is there international silence and a lack of accountability in the face of such clear legal and humanitarian violations at the Allenby Bridge?

The international silence surrounding the violations at the Allenby Bridge is one of the main reasons the occupation continues its abuses. As long as there is no real accountability, Palestinians are the ones paying the price.

This silence persists because of the unwavering political support and protection Israel receives in all international forums whether at the UN Security Council, the General Assembly, or global institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Many countries, when confronted with the clear and painful realities of Palestinian suffering, choose silence. This silence emboldens the occupation, allowing it to continue imposing cruel restrictions, denying freedom of

movement, and dehumanizing Palestinians at the crossing.

Although international law affirms the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, and the Geneva Conventions and human rights treaties guarantee their rights to freedom, dignity, and movement these rights are not implemented on the ground, especially at border crossings.

In this void of international action, Palestinians individuals and institutions are left to defend their rights alone, despite limited resources. War crimes and daily violations at the bridge and other crossings rarely lead to real accountability, due to the paralysis of international justice mechanisms particularly the ICC and the failure of national courts in some countries to intervene.

Some individual efforts do exist led by activists, lawyers, and advocates around the world—but they remain limited in impact. States party to the Geneva Conventions must take full legal and moral responsibility for enforcing international law.

In short, the international community possesses the legal, political, and moral tools needed to address these violations. But it refuses to use them, fearing repercussions to its own interests. As a result, the abuses at the Allenby Bridge persist daily humiliation, degradation, and denial of human dignity continue, with no real protection for Palestinians.

What role should the media play in challenging the narrative that the occupation promotes about the Allenby Bridge?

Palestinians endure daily suffering at the Allenby Bridge violations that amount to crimes against humanity. That's why this story must be told constantly, the perpetrators held accountable, and the occupation's policies exposed for what they are.

The media serves as a mirror of reality. Presenting these facts in audio and visual formats carries more power than written news alone. It's a responsibility that extends beyond journalists it belongs to every Palestinian: citizens, students, doctors, politicians, businesspeople, women, and children. It is a national responsibility to reveal and share this truth.

Palestinian media must ensure this issue remains on the local and international agenda. It must shed light on the massive daily suffering Palestinians endure at border crossings especially the prolonged closures of the Allenby Bridge at a time when most border crossings around the world operate 24/7.

This travel blockade and the absence of any alternative route harms all aspects of Palestinian life. It makes the fight for rights primarily a Palestinian responsibility, even before that of international bodies.

Through media, we can expose the occupation's hypocrisy in claiming to uphold human rights. The occupation targets not only resistance, but the entire Palestinian population including children, the elderly, and pregnant women inflicting pain that touches their everyday lives and dignity.

If you could deliver one message to the international community about what happens at the Allenby Bridge every day, what would it be?

Take full legal, political, and moral responsibility for the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation. Uphold their right to self-determination, the establishment of their own state, and an end to the occupation in accordance with international law and UN resolutions.

The international community must go beyond issuing statements of condemnation. It must take concrete steps to hold the occupation accountable, apply the principle of reciprocity, and assume its permanent humanitarian and legal responsibilities regarding the West Bank and Jerusalem's checkpoints. These checkpoints have turned occupied Palestine into a fragmented prison West Bank included.

International pressure must address all forms of violations from humiliation and degradation at crossings to the internationally prohibited collective punishment enacted daily at the Allenby Bridge. The global community has the means to act and it must act.