

Hotline...

Newsletter of Hotline: Center for the Defence of the Individual
2 Abu Obeidah St., Jerusalem, Tel. 02-283555

No. 3
June, 1991

Hotline

The Hotline (in Hebrew: *Hamoked*) is a Jerusalem human rights organization founded in July, 1988 operating out of a store front office in East Jerusalem. The Hotline was founded when it became evident that basic human rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories were being violated by the Israeli authorities in their attempts to control the uprising (Intifada) there. The aims of the Hotline are two-fold: (1) To represent individuals in their encounters with the authorities by lodging complaints about illegal behavior and ensuring that these complaints are addressed. (2) To influence official policy in collaboration with other human rights organizations.

Run by a small staff and a team of volunteers, the Hotline was established under the auspices of Sovlanut ("Tolerance"), a non-political organization that aims to combat violence and promote democratic values in Israel. At the end of 1989, the Hotline became an independent organization with an executive board that is responsible for policy and budget.

Meeting the New Challenges

In recent months, the Hotline's operations have been conducted in the shadow of the Gulf War and its aftermath. As a result of the prolonged curfew and closing off of the territories from Israel, the Palestinians suffered severe and widespread economic hardship.

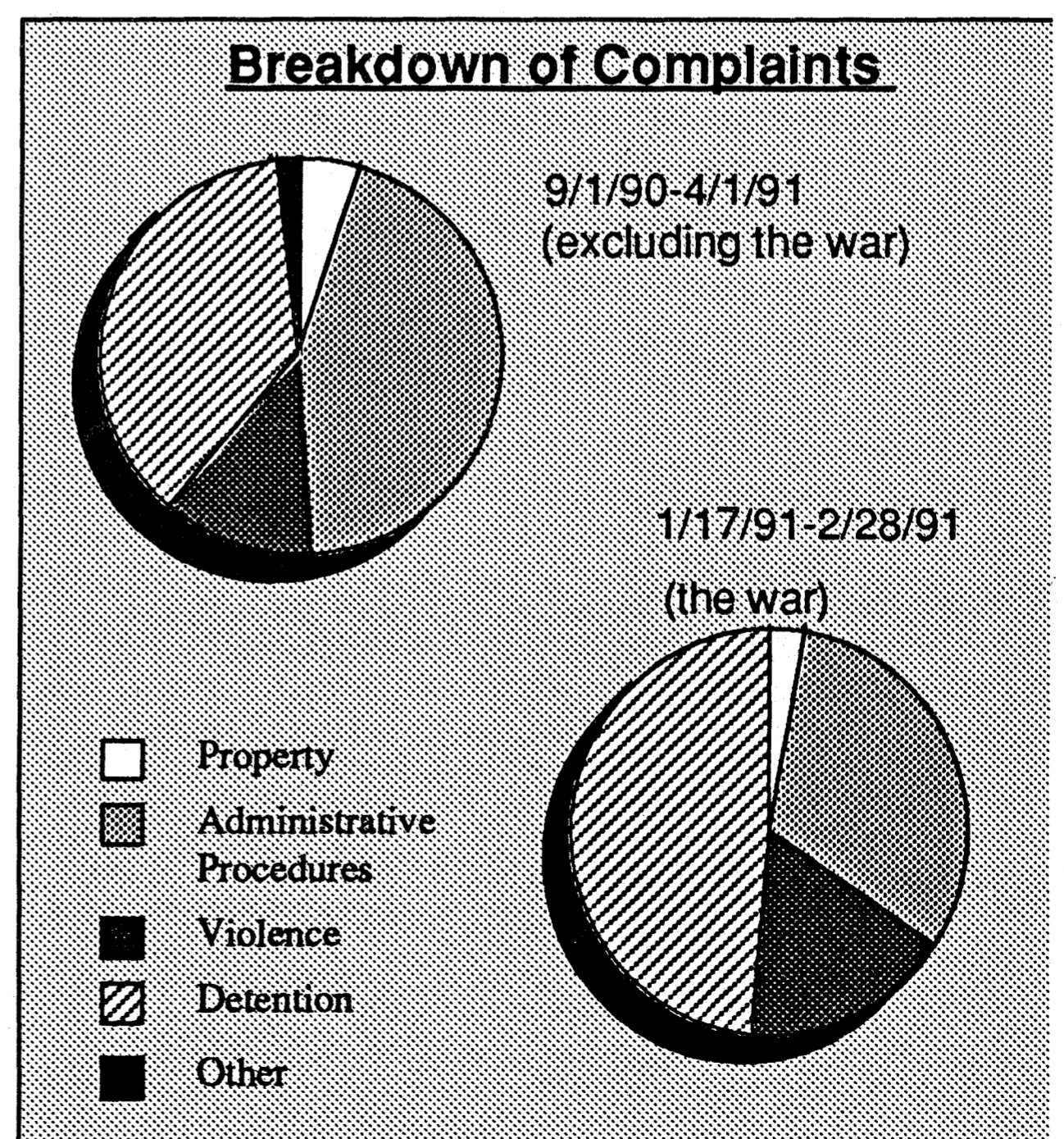
During the curfew, farmers were unable to harvest their crops, milk their herds, or market their produce. During both curfew and close off, Palestinian workers were unable to come to work in Israel. The situation has been further aggravated by the fact that the money sent home by Palestinians working in the Gulf states has also largely dried up.

The six-week curfew during the war also meant that fewer complaints were received by the Hotline during that period because potential clients could not reach the office, although more complaints were received by telephone than previously. In this situation, the Hotline found a new role for itself, cooperating with B'Tselem (the Israeli Information Center), to produce a report on the economic hardship, the numerous arrests with "quick trials", the stepped up administrative detentions, the closure of schools, the difficulties in gaining access to medical services, and other difficulties faced by the Palestinian community. Much of the information in this joint report was from the Hotline files, and these files were also used in the B'Tselem report on the torture of Palestinian "security detainees". Recently the new army chief of staff appointed an investigation team to look into interrogation methods.

The Hotline, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, and B'Tselem together appealed to the defense minister and to many Knesset members in an attempt to get the curfew lifted. At the same time, the Hotline participated in a news conference with the

Association for Civil Rights in Israel and B'Tselem, drawing the Israeli public's attention to the plight of the Palestinians.

After the war with the territories still largely closed off, the Hotline spotlighted the unfair and discriminatory issuing of work permits, by applying to the High Court of Justice on behalf of a resident of the West Bank village of



Battir who was being denied permission to work in Israel. The application was canceled when the man received his permit.

Two other Hotline applications to the High Court will be heard in the near future. One is asking for the release, or improved conditions of detention, for an administrative detainee suffering from a heart condition. The second concerns the refusal of an exit permit to a Palestinian who wishes to travel abroad for surgery.

Since the end of the war, the Hotline office has returned to dealing with the daily complaints of individual Palestinians. A comparison of the types of complaints received during the war with those in the months before and after the war show a 13% increase in the number of complaints of detention during the war and a corresponding decrease in the number of complaints related to administrative procedures. Complaints of violence and property damaged remained stable.

Contact with the Authorities

The Hotline has continued its policy of enlisting the cooperation of the official authorities when this is feasible.

Meeting with the Minister of Justice

Representatives of the Hotline met with Justice Minister Dan Meridor and Assistant State Attorney Yehudit Karp on the matter of compensation for victims of violence. They pointed out to the minister that Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem and the territories, who are physically or materially harmed by action by Israeli citizens, are not covered by the existing law concerning "victims of enemy action".

Noting that only "victims of enemy action" are entitled to compensation under the existing law, the minister agreed to look for a way to ensure that all victims of violence, from whatever source, should be entitled to compensation.

Meeting with the Central Command Attorney

The Hotline staff met with the Attorney of the IDF Central Command, Lieut. Col. Shlomo Politis about the neglect by his predecessor of 26 complaints from the Hotline of illegal behavior by IDF personnel. Lieut. Col. Politis promised action on the files and stated he would endeavor to improve communications between the Hotline and his department.

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Cooperation with Other Groups

In addition to continued cooperation with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and B'Tselem, the Hotline has started cooperating with the Tel Aviv-based "Workers' Hotline", a volunteer organization founded 18 months ago. The Workers' Hotline acts to secure the rights of Palestinians employed in Israel and to ensure that they receive their legal employment benefits.

When the Hotline staff encounter a work-related problem, they refer it to the Workers' Hotline staff who in turn refer non-labor problems to the Hotline. The Workers' Hotline operates out of our office one day a week.

Internal Hotline Report

One category of complaints that has been a source of frustration for the Hotline: complaints by Palestinians against violence and harassment by West Bank settlers and other Jewish civilians.

A special report by one of our volunteers shows that the 68 files opened by us have not led to a single prosecution. Examination of the files indicates that the police have a definite policy of refusing, discouraging, and delaying action on complaints by Arabs against Jews, despite the fact that they are legally obligated to investigate all the complaints they receive.

Plaintiffs are often not admitted to the police stations. When they are admitted, their complaints are frequently refused. When their complaints are registered, the file is sometimes 'misplaced'. Most of the files that are opened are closed on the grounds that the offender is unknown even though the plaintiffs can identify the offenders.

New Faces Around the Office

Andre Rosenthal, an attorney with considerable court experience, was appointed as the Hotline's new legal advisor, replacing Aliza Herman. As a result both of his appointment and of accumulated experience, Hotline policy has taken many more cases to court, and made several applications to the High Court of Justice.

Dalia Kerstein has replaced Tsilli Goldenberg as co-director (with Ala al-Khatib). Kerstein was previously active in the Women for Women Political Prisoners organization and was Hebrew editor of the Palestinian Hebrew-language paper, Geshet.

Rachel Elmaqais has replaced Avigail Haim as office secretary.

Hotline Client: Monologue

There is no typical Hotline client. The person walking into the Hotline office could simply be seeking a travel permit or asking assistance in registering children in an identity card. Alternatively he or she might be trying to locate a relative who has been arrested, or seeking redress for damage to property, harassment or violence on the part of policemen, soldiers or officials. Each case is different - like that of Ibrahim Wahbi.

Ibrahim Wahbi, 28, a bachelor from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Wadi Joz, is a Christian Arab born in West Jerusalem. He has lived in the eastern part of the city since 1968. The slim, dark, bespectacled Wahbi wears jeans and sports shirt, and speaks fluent Hebrew; but because of his continued residence in East Jerusalem, his experience has been more that of a west-bank Palestinian than of an Israeli citizen.

Here he describes what brought him to the Hotline office:

"It was more than a year ago that I went home one evening with two friends in an East Jerusalem taxi. After taking one of them home, we continued to the Shuafat refugee camp to drop off the other. As we were leaving the camp, the taxi was stopped by a squad of Border Police and I was ordered to get out.

"There were four Border Policemen with a jeep. I was told to take off my clothes for a search. I took off my jacket and shirt. They told me to take off my trousers. Then they ordered me to take off my underwear too, and my shoes and socks.

"I was completely naked. I stood there for about 10 minutes. I really didn't know how to behave; but then they told me I

could get dressed again. They made fun of me, laughed at me, made all sorts of personal remarks. Before I left the camp, I wrote down the number of their jeep.

"I came to the Hotline office the following day. Ala al-Khatib took down my story and then he drove me to the Border Police headquarters in Lod to lodge my complaint. Subsequently the Border Police complaints commissioner in Talpiot, Jerusalem, dealt with my case. There was a lot of questioning of my veracity.

"I admitted I couldn't be sure about identifying the Border Policemen from photographs, because it had all occurred in the dark. I didn't want to get an innocent man into trouble. I only had the number of their jeep. They said they wanted to test the policemen with a lie detector. That's what they said but in fact they tested me. I came out positively, as telling the truth.

"Altogether, I went to Talpiot at least three times. There were letters back and forth. Finally I received a letter that there had been a disciplinary hearing, and that the men who humiliated me had been reprimanded. Not much perhaps, but at least something.

"There was another incident several years ago. I was standing outside the Hakawati Theater in East Jerusalem. A man in plain clothes ordered me to go in and report back to him on what was happening inside. When I refused I was taken to the Jerusalem police station in the Russian compound, interrogated and beaten.

"That time I didn't complain at all. It was before the Hotline office opened and there wasn't any point. If you have to retain an attorney it costs money, and anyway you don't get results."

Profile: Ala al-Khatib, co-director of the Hotline

Ala al-Khatib, 26, from the village of Tira in the coastal plain, began as a volunteer with the Hotline, when it started operating out of a room in the American Colony Hotel in July 1988. Al-Khatib, who has a B.Sc. in biology, and an M.Sc. in genetics from the Hebrew University, was recruited by Yossi Schwartz, the first director of the Hotline, who invited him to become co-director in October of that year, a position he stills holds.

In those early days recalls Khatib, he and Schwartz worked seven days a week, 10 hours a day manning the office in alternate shifts without a break.

Khatib's main responsibility was receiving complaints. To this end, he trained a corps of volunteers. The Hotline started with some 20 volunteers, and has twice that number today. Khatib still coordinates their activities and he is also in charge of the computer.

Khatib joined the Hotline "because it seemed to be a way of helping my people in a practical manner". He finds the work

very satisfying. He had been politically active previously, he explains, but all it meant was demonstrating and protesting. The Hotline was different; there was a specific job of work to do.

"For the first time I feel I can really help Palestinians because I have an Israeli identity card," he states. "The Hotline is also the best example of Arab-Jewish cooperation I have ever come across. At the university in seven years I only made one real Jewish friend. At the Hotline I have many. In my experience the Hotline is unique."

Differences and disputes do come up, he notes, but they are always resolved in a fair and democratic manner. Khatib comments that there has been a change of style in the Hotline in recent months. "We are more forceful today. We now go to court much more and in my opinion it is very effective. Sometimes the threat is enough. We used to write letters again and again. Today, if we don't get an answer, we take legal action. We are getting more results and getting them more quickly.

Message from the Chairperson

Almost a year has passed since I wrote in our first newsletter looking forward to the day when we could celebrate the publication of our last newsletter. Unfortunately that day has not yet arrived. Instead we have had a year of war and escalation of the Intifada, with the natural result that the burden of our work has increased.

The events of the past year did not only lead to an increase in the volume of complaints to the Hotline, but also to doubts about our operations. I received a number of calls from supporters of the Hotline, wondering whether we should continue in the new circumstances. How was it possible, these people asked, to continue defending Palestinians, when every Scud rocket fired at Tel Aviv caused so much joy and celebration in the Palestinian community. The knife attacks which took their toll of innocent Israeli citizens at bus stops and playgrounds only served to increase the doubts and uncertainties.

During the war, through the spate of attacks - and even when my own car was set on fire by a petrol-bomb outside the Hotline office - I continued to believe that our operation was correct, just, and vitally important. Firstly we have to remember that the vast majority of Palestinians are not actively involved in hostile action. On the other hand, all of them are victims of the Israeli reaction, whether they are arrested

because they happened to be at the site of an incident, whether they are attacked in spontaneous rioting in response to an incident, or whether they suffer from prolonged curfews and closures.

We must also remember that in an advanced and enlightened society, even someone suspected of a serious offense is entitled to fair, honest, and equal treatment under the law. Unfortunately, Palestinian suspects and their families do not receive such treatment.

We exist in order to counteract these shortcomings, to ease the plight of innocent victims, and to ensure the rights even of those who are not innocent. Such aims cannot be abandoned even in light of the events of the past year, and I am glad to say that they have not been.

This year has seen us advancing both in the sphere of individual assistance, and in getting ourselves known by the police, army and Ministry of Justice. We are receiving increasing cooperation from these bodies, and in some cases even goodwill.

I cannot end without once again thanking our loyal and devoted staff and volunteers, and our friends and supporters from here and abroad, without whom we would not be able to continue with our tasks.

Lotte Salzberger

Finance

The increased legal and other activities at the Hotline office has lead to a considerable increase in operating costs. The projected budget for 1991 is in excess of \$110,000 of which some 65% has been raised to date.

The Hotline is also seeking additional finance for the following:

- 1) An additional attorney for collecting depositions from clients in the field. With the current official policy of complete or partial closing off of the territories, it has become increasingly difficult for Palestinians needing the Hotline's assistance to come to the office. An additional attorney could travel out to meet our clients in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.
- 2) A field worker to assist the second attorney, to conduct research on the types of abuses that occur, and to determine what intervention might be needed.
- 3) A fax machine for faster and more effective communication with the army, the police, the Border Police, and government offices regarding complaints, abuses, demands for investigation and bureaucratic problems. It will also facilitate better contact with Knesset members, alerting them to specific issues and particular violations of human rights.

Contributions in support of the Hotline may be sent directly to: Account no. 452939, Branch 638, Barclay's Discount Bank, Salah E-Din St., Jerusalem, Israel.

In the United States and Canada, tax-deductible contributions may be made through the New Israel Fund. Checks should be made out to the New Israel Fund and be identified as intended for the Hotline--Hamoked. In the U. S., write to: New Israel Fund, 111 W. 40th St., Suite 2600, New York, NY 10018; in Canada: New Israel Fund, 40 Dundas St. W., Suite 231, Box 29, Toronto, Ont. M5G 2C2.

In Great Britain, contributions may be made through the Jerusalem Foundation, and should be identified as intended for the Hotline--Hamoked. Checks should be sent to: Esther Berkowitz, Secretary, Jerusalem Foundation U.K., c/o Bank Leumi U.K. plc, 101 Golders Green Rd., London NW11 8EN.