

If Americans Knew:

***CounterPunch* details AP cover-up on Israeli practice of strip searching civilians: British Consul General, evangelicals, journalists, Americans, children...**

<<http://counterpunch.org/weir07292008.html>> **July 29, 2008**

A footnoted article in today's *CounterPunch* details an Associated Press cover-up of Israel's long-standing practice of strip searching civilians of all ages and both sexes, including the British Consul General, pregnant women, Christian evangelicals, international journalists, Americans, and children. In some cases eyewitnesses describe Israeli soldiers forcing Palestinians to strip naked and then shooting them dead.

The article, "Israeli Strip Searches: Letting AP In On the Secret," by media watchdog organization If Americans Knew, reveals that AP virtually never reported on what is, according to journalists from the region, a "widely accepted secret." In fact, in a recent AP report that finally mentioned the practice (responding to external pressure to report on an internationally renowned journalist who had been forcibly strip searched at gunpoint), AP claimed that "allegations of strip searches are apparently unusual."

On the contrary, according to the *CounterPunch* article: "...frequent, random humiliation by Israeli soldiers and officials is part of the Palestinian experience. Numerous degrading strip searches – some of them particularly grotesque – have been forced on Palestinian men, women, and children of all ages for decades.

"In addition, Israeli officials periodically strip-search others whenever, it appears, they wish, including:

The British Consul General[i] (Israeli media reported that her search was "prolonged, needless and humiliating," and that "by the end of the process Rogan was upset and had begun crying."[ii];

An American holocaust survivor (she was treated to a "cavity search");[iii]

Sixteen Christian evangelicals rounded up at gunpoint;[iv]

Journalists from around the world (an Argentinean journalist wrote: "... they made me go to another office and strip naked. An official came in stands next to me, while I'm naked, with a machine gun in his hand..."[v]

A Swiss reporter was forced to remove her pants in public and stand in her underwear, hands raised, in front of an x-ray machine);[vi]

A wheel-chair bound New Jersey woman with cerebral palsy whose sanitary pad was confiscated and which she was not allowed to replace, humiliating her publicly;[vii]

An American doctoral student, who was also subjected to a cavity search[viii] ... the list goes on and on.

"Yet, somehow, AP missed all of these. In fact, amazingly, a LexisNexis search of Associated Press stories over the past 10 years, using the search terms "Israel" and "strip search," turns up not a single story that even mentioned Israeli strip-searches of civilians, diplomats, journalists, children, etc. In fact, there is only one result in the hundreds of thousands of stories AP issued on Israel-Palestine during the past ten years – a few stories on a hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners protesting against, among other things, their daily strip searches by Israeli guards."

The article, by Alison Weir, states that If Americans Knew sent AP a 25-page document listing descriptions of Israeli strip-searches, with brief excerpts from each, and asked for a correction on their AP report. AP refused to comment.

Following are excerpts from this list (the entire document is available on the If Americans Knew website– Full url: http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/strip-searches.html).

* In 2007 the Palestinian Minister of Women's Affairs issued a statement protesting the policy of Israeli soldiers taking Palestinian women "to separate rooms in the checkpoint and being forced to remove all clothes, to become fully naked." The minister demanded that the UN and the international community provide security for Palestinian women.[ix] <#_edn9>

* Even the *New York Times* (which justified it) reported about the Allenby border in 1987: "Before any visitor gets in, however, he must go through a stringent security check at the Israeli terminal. Besides being examined by metal detectors, each visitor must undergo a private strip search..."[x]

* A University of Utah law student describes a PhD student conducting research in the region who was detained at the border crossing for six hours, "Then a female guard conducted a strip/cavity search while two male guards observed."[xi]

* A British researcher reports: "While men have also reported forms of sexual torture in jail, women prisoners are particularly vulnerable to this as a form of humiliation by their captors. Women are forced to strip naked in front of guards, many of whom are male, and subjected to brutal body searches. Many women prisoners have detailed sexual assault by Israeli military and prison staff. On some occasions women are detained as a way of threatening or putting pressure on a male member of the family.[xii]

* A Palestinian woman trying to reach a hospital reports: "...the labour pains grew stronger. I saw a lot of soldiers in front of me. I called out at them using the word "baby" which I think some understood. They started to talk to me in Hebrew as they pointed the guns towards me. They used signs and gestures. I understood that they wanted me to show them how pregnant I was which I did. One soldier asked me to take off my robe, which I did. But it was not sufficient and he asked me to remove the T-shirt and the trousers. I had no choice and I was ready to go as far as that in order to get to the hospital before it was late. He asked me to take off my underwear which I did. After this humiliation, they fetched a stretcher from one of the tanks. I was naked. I was carried to a tank and was given intravenous glucose into my arm. A few minutes later, they brought my father-in-law inside the tank. They drove for almost half an hour. I was thinking they were taking me to a nearby hospital but it turns out they were taking us back to the Huwwara checkpoint. We were taken out of the tank and were laid nude on the stretchers for almost one hour..."[xiii]

* Reuters reported: "Three Israeli soldiers forced a Palestinian man to strip naked at gunpoint and walk like a dog in a West Bank city under curfew...A Reuters photographer snapped Yasser Sharaf, 25, standing naked in a cold, muddy street in Nablus on Sunday as two men were handing him clothes to put on and two Israeli armoured vehicles were pulling away from the scene."[xiv]

* Reporters who entered Nablus after the Israeli invasion of 2002 quoted from an interview with one of the inhabitants: "The men were then driven to a nearby yard, ordered to strip naked, and made to lie face down in the dirt. While my neighbor Jamal Sabar was taking off his pants, they shot him dead..."[xv]

* "A soldier inside the jeep ordered me to raise my hands and get out of the car and said, 'take off your shirt.' I did; then he said, 'and the pants.' I did; then he said, 'the undershirt and underwear.' I begged him not to force me; and he said, 'I'll shoot you.' And all the soldiers pointed their guns at me. I took off my underclothes and stood naked in front of everybody. He ordered, 'proceed with your hands up.' I came up to him and he gave me a transparent plastic bag to cover myself. He blindfolded me and made me sit 20 meters away. Then the soldier shouted at a passenger called Islam 'Abed al-Sheikh Ibrahim, 18, who was sitting in the front seat, and ordered him to get out of the car. He told the soldier that his leg was broken, but the soldier insisted. He Islam got out and stood on his crutches. The soldier ordered him to take off his clothes. He tried by failed. The soldier came to me and removed the binding off my eyes and told me at gunpoint to go and help him take off his clothes. I went and helped the passenger take off all his clothes. The soldier told me to help him walk to the soldier. We walked up and he gave me another nylon bag for Islam. Then, he told us to sit on the ground. Soon after, the soldier ordered another passenger, Yasser Rasheed al-Sheikh Ibrahim, 60, to get out of the car and take off his clothes like us..."[xvi]

* The Guardian described an incident in which a commander was "awaiting a court martial on several charges, including ordering the boy to strip naked, holding a burning paper under his testicles, threatening to ram a bottle into his anus and threatening to shoot him..."[xvii]

* "We were mostly older people, sick and wounded. We had nine handicapped people with us, three were from the same family, sons of Abu Ibrahim. Some of us were too old, they were senile. When they told them 'go left' they would go right, but they stripped them naked anyway. I tried to help them as much as I could. I was the only one who spoke Hebrew...Close to us was a group of young men. They were handcuffed, naked and lying on their stomachs. The Israeli tanks would pass by them so fast, only forty centimeters away from their heads."[xviii]

* "Other residents described how young men were stripped naked and then shot. Yusuf Shalabi, a young man from the camp explained how the Israeli soldiers denied medical treatment to the wounded, '...I remember this nightmare very well. It is very difficult to talk about it. I remember them stripping the people naked, they would handcuff them and blindfold them. I remember seeing two wounded men, one was wounded in the shoulder and the other in the leg. They were screaming in pain and the soldiers would not allow them to be treated.'"[xix]

"Incredibly, AP seems to have missed all of these, and more. As a result, Americans have little idea of the life is like for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.

"Moreover, strip searches are just the tip of the iceberg. According to an Israeli government report released in 2000 (five years after it had been written) Shin Bet "used systematic torture against Palestinians and regularly lied about it."[xx] <#_edn20> An Israeli human rights organization estimated that 85 percent of Palestinian detainees had been subjected to torture. [xxi] In 2002 *Foreign Service Journal* carried a major expose on Israel torturing American citizens.[xxii] AP managed to miss this *Foreign Service Journal* expose – as did, therefore, every newspaper in the country.

The article concludes:

"AP is a cooperative, which means that every single newspaper, radio station, and television station that uses AP news is an owner of AP and, therefore, ultimately responsible for its reporting. This includes Democracy Now, which, apart from a report on Mohammed Omer, also seems to have covered Israel's longstanding and pervasive pattern of degrading strip searches minimally, if at all.

"It is time for all these news media, and for their readers, listeners, and viewers, to demand that AP provide the full story. Americans have long given Israel, the size of New Jersey, far more of our tax money than to any other nation on earth. It is time to end the cover up on systemic Israeli practices of humiliation. Americans need to know how Israel is using our money."

[i] "British consul strip searched at Israeli PM's office," Rory, *The Guardian*, March 28, 2007

[ii] "Senior British Diplomat Strip-Searches at PM's Office," Itamar Eichner, *Israel News*, March 27, 2007.

[iii] "Humiliation and Child Abuse at Israeli Checkpoints: Strip-Searching Children," Alison Weir, CounterPunch, March 15, 2007; Video interview: The Easiest Targets:
<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/about_us/easiesttargets.html> http://www.ifamericansknew.org/about_us/easiesttargets.html

[iv] "Israelis arrest 16 from US in roundup of Christians," Charles M. Sennott, *The Boston Globe*, October 26, 1999, Pg. A2

[v] <<http://peoplesgeography.com/2006/09/01/israeli-security-forces-kidnap-argentine-journalist/>> <http://peoplesgeography.com/2006/09/01/israeli-security-forces-kidnap-argentine-journalist/>

[vi] <<http://www.fpa.org.il/?categoryId=422>> <http://www.fpa.org.il/?categoryId=422>

[vii] "Humiliation and Child Abuse at Israeli Checkpoints: Strip-Searching Children," Alison Weir, CounterPunch, March 15, 2007; Video interview: The Easiest Targets:
<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/about_us/easiesttargets.html> http://www.ifamericansknew.org/about_us/easiesttargets.html

[viii] <<http://www.law.utah.edu/blogs/show-entry.asp?EntryID=252>> <http://www.law.utah.edu/blogs/show-entry.asp?EntryID=252>

[ix] <<http://www.maannews.net/en/index.php?opr=ShowDetails&ID=23480>> <http://www.maannews.net/en/index.php?opr=ShowDetails&ID=23480>
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[x] "ALLENBY BRIDGE JOURNAL; A 15-Yard Span Over a Great Divide," Thomas L. Friedman, *New York Times*, July 18, 1987

[xi] <<http://www.law.utah.edu/blogs/show-entry.asp?EntryID=252>> <http://www.law.utah.edu/blogs/show-entry.asp?EntryID=252>

[xii] "Israel's Palestinian Prisoners: The Forgotten Facts," Isabelle Humphries, Researcher – Nazareth
<http://www.islamonline.net/english/Muslim_Affairs/Asia/PoliticsEconomy/2006/07/01.shtml> http://www.islamonline.net/english/Muslim_Affairs/Asia/PoliticsEconomy/2006/07/01.shtml

[xiii] "Israel's Implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), May, 2005, Al-Haq: Law in the Service of Man, the Palestinian Centre for Human rights (PCHR), and the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)

<http://www.pchrgaza.org/special/OPT%20CEDAW%20Main%20Review.pdf>><http://www.pchrgaza.org/special/OPT%20CEDAW%20Main%20Review.pdf>

[xiv] "Israelis Make Palestinian Strip Naked," Reuters, Nov. 25, 2002

[xv] "Jenin: Lying Down On Broken Glass, Crushing Bones," April 16, 2002 (IslamOnline & News Agencies) <<http://www.islamonline.net/english/News/2002-04/16/article40.shtml>><http://www.islamonline.net/english/News/2002-04/16/article40.shtml>

[xvi] "Weekly Report on Israeli Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," 01 - 07 September 2005, <http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/W_report/English/2005/08-09-2005.htm>http://www.pchrgaza.org/files/W_report/English/2005/08-09-2005.htm

[xvii] "Commander charged with torturing Palestinian boy," Chris McGreal, *The Guardian*, October 22, 2002

[xviii] "Stripping Palestinians has Become Common Practice: Eyewitness Accounts," Suzanne Russ, *Palestine Chronicle*, November 26, 2002, <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/strippingcommon.html>http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/strippingcommon.html

[xix] "Stripping Palestinians has Become Common Practice: Eyewitness Accounts," By Suzanne Russ, *Palestine Chronicle*, November 26, 2002, <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/strippingcommon.html>http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/strippingcommon.html

[xx] "Report: Palestinian suspects mistreated by Israeli captors," Joel Greenberg, *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 2007

[xxi] "Report: Palestinian suspects mistreated by Israeli captors," Joel Greenberg, *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 2007

[xxii] "Arab-Americans in Israel: What 'Special Relationship'?" Jerri Bird, *Foreign Service Journal*, June, 2002