



# COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY IN PALESTINE: AN ALTERNATIVE TO POLICING

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Many communities across the world have for decades been [challenging the notion](#) that police and state justice institutions are forces of good. They argue that these institutions do not and cannot provide the level of justice that is required for the survivors and victims of harm and the wider community to heal. The [Black Lives Matter movement](#) has brought challenging state policing and state justice systems to the forefront of mainstream media. In particular, [police and prison abolitionism](#), has gained traction. Abolitionism recognizes that policing and prison systems entrench colonial, racial, class, and gendered oppression, and that incarceration as a response to harm and grievances does little to address the root causes at hand.

In colonized Palestine, the Israeli carceral regime has devastated Palestinian society and it is an issue which undeniably unites Palestinians. However, this unity has not yet led to a wider challenge to policing and incarceration. Indeed, many Palestinians make a clear separation between “political prisoners”—those accused of “security offences” by the Israeli regime—and “criminal prisoners.” One of the outcomes of this differentiation between prisoners as political and non-political is the implication that the root causes of “crimes” are not political, which is a dangerous and misleading claim. All prisoners are political.

Palestinians have been continually fighting for international recognition of their status as “political prisoners.” Through military court boycotts, [hunger strikes](#), writings, and oral testimonies, Palestinian prisoners have asserted the importance of this political classification as it highlights incarceration as the ultimate tactic of control by the colonial state. This status also distinguishes between “political” and “criminal” prisoners, the latter of whom are incarcerated by both the Israeli regime and the Palestinian Authority (PA).

Since the 1993 Oslo Accords, the PA security forces and criminal justice system have monopolized the processes of solving conflicts and prosecuting crimes. Yet the creation of Palestinian policing and security institutions was not a step towards liberation; it was an extension and outsourcing of the colonial carceral regime. The PA security forces operate under the framework of “[securitized peace](#),” meaning that they work in [full cooperation](#) with the Israeli regime. Today, the budget for the PA security sector is larger than that of the health, agriculture, and education sectors combined. Not only are these priorities skewed, it is particularly worrying considering the PA security forces have been consistently and systematically suppressing political dissent and opposition.

But communities have been solving grievances and addressing violence well before the emergence of nation-states. Today, communities around the world are reigniting practices of community accountability and transformative justice that build upon an intersectional understanding of power structures, such as those based on patriarchy, class, and race.

Community accountability is a strategy that seeks to address grievances and violence within communities without the involvement of policing institutions. It thus often involves transformative justice, which seeks to understand why the violence, harm, or grievance took place, and how to prevent it from happening again in the future.

In Palestine, *sulha* has long been used as a practice of accountability and reconciliation between conflicting parties without the presence of the state. However, *sulha* is problematic and unrepresentative; it is wrought with patriarchal and class dynamics. As a result, there have been recent efforts among Palestinian communities to tackle violence and harm outside of the *sulha* process. One such case was in the Palestinian town of Kufr Qassem, where a youth group known as *Haras al-Balad* (protectors of the town) was established in order to mobilize against local mobs who were extracting protection money from people. During the Unity Intifada of May 2021, *Haras al-Balad* blocked the Israeli police from entering the town and arresting activists.

The key to finding the right community accountability model is to draw upon the experiences of others and to tailor it to the context and needs of a given community. The following are recommendations for Palestinian civil society and the international donor community for practicing community accountability and transformative justice that move away from incarceration:

#### Civil Society:

- Palestinian civil society organizations (CSOs), advocacy groups, and grassroots collectives should prioritize developing their community accountability skills.
- Palestinian educational institutions, CSOs, and businesses should develop and adopt emergency protocols that avoid police interventions.
- Palestinian CSOs and civil society more broadly should advocate for and support policies that shrink the police and carceral systems across colonized Palestine, including calling for defunding police and security forces.

#### Donor Community:

- Donors should end their collaboration with Palestinian security forces and prioritize funding alternative and transformative justice initiatives.
- Donors should make resources available for Palestinian civil society and grassroots groups to pursue community accountability practices, including mental health services, education, and community support groups.