

Free Samaher Esmail!

written by Gregory E. Williams
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Ibrahim Hamed with mother Samaher Esmail. Photo courtesy of Ibrahim Hamed

On Feb. 5, Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) soldiers kidnapped Samaher Esmail, a 46-year-old mother and Palestinian-American who lives in Gretna, Louisiana. The kidnapping occurred in the family home near Silwad city in the occupied West Bank, as reported by her son, Ibrahim Hamed.

Both the IOF and the U.S. State Department confirmed the arrest, but have revealed little else. The occupiers have prevented the family from obtaining information about Samaher's whereabouts or condition. This is typical, and is part of the Israeli practice of "administrative detention."

A Palestinian-American school teacher - another resident of the greater New Orleans area - wrote the following to explain the context of Samaher's situation, a context often absent in mainstream media coverage:

"Administrative detention - a grim facet of Israeli military policy - involves the arbitrary apprehension of Palestinian individuals in the West Bank and Gaza. Labeling them as 'potential suspects,' the military confines them to prisons for up to six months, with the possibility of indefinite extension, all without trial, formal charges, or due process.

"Families are left in agonizing uncertainty about their loved ones' whereabouts, while detainees are denied access to legal counsel. Shockingly, [even children as young as 8 or 9](#) are not spared from this injustice, further exacerbating the trauma inflicted upon entire communities.

"The surge in detentions from 1,200 to about 4,000 between Oct. 7, 2023, and January 2024 reflects Israel's wanton disregard for international standards, which mandate the use of administrative detention only in emergency situations. This abusive practice has [become a cornerstone](#) of Israel's oppressive policies against Palestinians throughout its existence, perpetuating a climate of fear and uncertainty among the populace.

“The recent kidnapping of Samaher Esmail, a 49-year-old American-Palestinian mother and resident of Gretna, Louisiana, with strong ties to the Palestinian city of Silwad, underscores the chilling reality faced by those who dare to speak out against Israeli injustices. Despite her unknown offense, it is suspected that her social media post expressing grief over the death of a Palestinian at the hands of Israeli settlers served as the pretext for her detention.

“This blatant suppression of dissent highlights Israel’s attempts to silence those who expose its atrocities, particularly through social media censorship.

“The [tragic toll on journalists and media personnel](#), with more than 122 lives lost in Gaza since October, serves as a stark reminder of Israel’s ruthless campaign to stifle first-hand information on its terrors.

“The U.S. government must condemn Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza. We demand an immediate ceasefire to halt the bloodshed. Accountability for human rights violations is non-negotiable.

“Samaher Esmail must be returned to her family without delay.”

