



The Abu Jihad Museum

Courtesy of The Palestinian Museum

Abu Jihad Museum at Al Quds University in Abu Dis was founded in 1997 to document the experience of 800,000 Palestinians who have gone through the experience of imprisonment throughout the years of the Palestinian struggle. The design of the place carries a lot of symbolic connotations, where every increment signifies a station in the Palestinian history and cause.

The museum experience culminated in the completion of a national archive that includes approximately 110,000 documents, including books, messages, data, and books and manuscripts written by prisoners, or dealing with their cases, which constitutes a documentation of the history of the political imprisonment movement in all its aspects and details. Currently, the museum is converting the archives, which are usually available to students and researchers, to an electronic database.

The museum building's design embodies the final walk of Jesus Christ, who the museum considers the first Palestinian political prisoner. When you walk into the museum, the walkway resembles Via Dolorosa, but with current additions to represent the Occupation, like the apartheid wall and scattered checkpoints.

A kina tree, the same as one that used to be in front of the Ashkelon prison, stands at the entrance to the museum. For thirty-two years, prisoners sang songs and wrote poems about it, until the Israeli wardens destroyed it. The tree in the Abu Jihad Museum was planted as a reminder of that significant landmark.



Jerusalem tile covers the floor of the museum building, and inside is a wall that represents the wall of Jerusalem. Thus, the museum tells the story of the history of imprisonment from the ground up.

There are also paintings in the museum that portray arrest and torture techniques, while a mural stands in the center, embodying the imagination and struggle of the Palestinian people, and their constant quest for freedom and independence.

The pieces and paintings in the museum have a documentary style, each of which carries a title and a detailed explanation. The most important image is that of the martyrs of the political imprisonment movement from 1965 to the present, who died either as a result of medical negligence, execution, or recurrent hunger strikes inside prisons. The museum also houses pieces about children prisoners, administrative detention, international law, secret prisons in Israel, and prisoner exchanges in past years. The museum also documents the ways prisoners connect with the outside world, whether through lawyers, human rights institutions or parents, in addition to the ways prisoners smuggle messages using capsules. The museum also includes a model of the cell used for solitary confinement, which represents one of the stages of imprisonment.

In the middle of one of the halls in a glass box containing gallows, which are a reminder of the executions of Palestinian leaders that took place during the British Mandate, and later on the hands of Zionist gangs.

The museum also screens a 17-minute film about the Palestinian cause from 1948 until today, which is produced by the Abu Jihad Museum, and is viewed by a wide variety of visiting groups, especially students.

Another wing of the museum features the role of letter writing in the life of prisoners, and a collection of works of art that they've made and were able to smuggle out with them after the end of their terms of detention.

Even though the many facets of this museum are painful, it is worth visiting in order for all of us to connect with some of the most important members of our society, who struggle everyday to survive under an occupying force both inside and out.

