



One of the Palestinian prisoners, who was released in a prisoner-hostage swap and ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, is carried on shoulders



One (L) of the Palestinian prisoners, who was released in a prisoner-hostage swap and ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, is kissed by his brother



One of the Palestinian prisoners, who was released in a prisoner-hostage swap and ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, is embraced by a woman



One of the Palestinian prisoners, who was released in a prisoner-hostage swap and ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, embraces a boy upon arrival



Buses carrying Palestinians released from Israeli prisons



Buses carrying Palestinians released from Israeli prisons under a Gaza ceasefire and hostage exchange deal with Palestinian factions, arrive outside the Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip

‘New birth’

Palestinians freed from Israeli jails return to loved ones

AFP | Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

With huge crowds waiting to welcome them home, Palestinian prisoners released by Israel yesterday under a Gaza ceasefire deal were overwhelmed with joy as they returned to their loved ones.

Some threw peace signs while others struggled to walk without assistance as they got off the bus and were met by a crowd cheering their return from Israel's jails to the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"It's an indescribable feeling, a new birth," Mahdi Ramadan, newly released, told AFP, flanked by his parents with whom he said he would spend his first evening out of jail.

Nearby, relatives exchanged hugs, young men in tears pressed their foreheads against each other -- some even fainting from the emotion of seeing loved ones again after years, and sometimes decades, in jail.

The crowd chanted in celebration "Allahu akbar", meaning God is the greatest.

Among the Palestinians to be released under a US-brokered Gaza ceasefire deal, 250 are security detainees, including many convicted of killing Israelis, as well as about 1,700 Palestinians detained by the Israeli army in Gaza during the war.

Israel agreed to free them in exchange for the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip, under the first phase of US President Donald Trump's plan to end the war that was sparked by Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.



A former Palestinian prisoner (R), released as part of the seventh hostage-prisoner exchange, is welcomed by relatives



A crowd welcomes Palestinians formerly jailed by Israel as they arrive in a Red Cross convoy to Ramallah in the occupied West Bank

'Beautiful moment'

Nour Soufan, now 27 years old, was due to meet his father Mousa, who was jailed a few months after his birth, outside of jail for the first time.

Soufan and half a dozen relatives came to Ramallah from Nablus, in the north of the West Bank, and spent the night in their vehicle.

"I have never seen my father, and this is the first time I will see him. This is a very beautiful

moment," Soufan said.

Like him, many had defied the travel restrictions that puncture daily life in the Palestinian territory, with Israeli army checkpoints proliferating in two years of war.

Palestinian media reported on Sunday that families of detainees had been contacted by Israeli authorities, asking them not to organise mass celebrations.

"No reception is allowed, no celebration is allowed, no gatherings," said Alaa Bani Odeh, who came from the northern town of

Tammun to find his 20-year-old son who had been jailed for four years.

AFP spoke to several prisoners who said that in their first hours of freedom, they would go home and stay with family.

During previous releases, mass gatherings had flooded entire streets in Ramallah, with people waving Palestinian flags as well as those of political factions including Hamas.

'Live my life'

Dressed in the grey tracksuits of Israeli prisons, many prisoners also wore a black-and-white kuffiyeh around their necks -- the traditional scarf that has become synonymous with the Palestinian cause.

Some of the newly released prisoners happily let themselves be carried away on relatives' shoulders.

"Prisoners live on hope... Coming home, to our land, is worth all the gold in the world," said one freed detainee, Samer al-Halabiye.

"God willing, peace will prevail, and the war on Gaza will stop," Halabiye added.

"Now I just want to live my life."

Journalists rushed to talk to the prisoners, but many declined to engage, sometimes explaining that before their release, they were advised not to speak.

In the south Gaza city of Khan Yunis, a crowd gathered near Nasser Hospital, in the hope of catching sight of the prisoners taken during the war with Israel.

In the afternoon, thousands cheered to welcome their loved ones as they caught glimpse of the buses carrying them home.