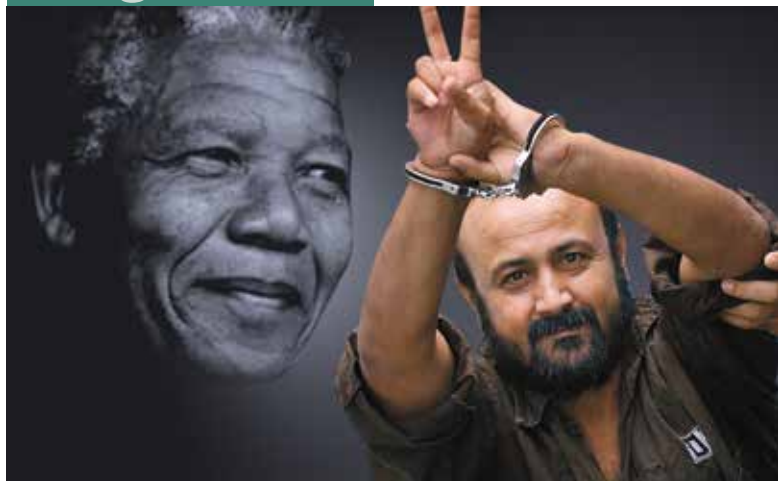


# Marwan Barghouthi



**M**arwan Barghouthi is a political leader and elected official imprisoned by Israel. Born in 1959, he was arrested for the first time at the age of 15. Since then, Marwan has spent a total of 22 years in Israeli jails.

In 2015, Marwan explained, “I joined the struggle for Palestinian independence 40 years ago and was first imprisoned at the age of 15. This did not prevent me from pleading for peace in accordance with international law and UN resolutions. But Israel, the occupying power, has methodically destroyed this perspective year after year. These years (in prison) have made me even more certain of this unalterable truth: the last day of occupation will be the first day of peace.” In April 2002, Marwan was the first parliamentarian to be arrested. If by this Israel was hoping to criminalize the Palestinian struggle, the incarceration of this prominent leader has instead shed a powerful light on the darkness of Israeli cells and on the fate of more than 850,000 Palestinians who have gone through them and the 7,000 who are still there:

political leaders, militants, academics, children, bystanders...

The conviction rate of Israeli military courts stands at 99 percent, demonstrating that they are instruments of oppression not justice. But while Israel was hoping to isolate and silence Marwan, 15 years later he is the most popular leader among Palestinians and a global symbol of the struggle for freedom. In 2015, an international campaign to free Marwan and all Palestinian prisoners was launched by Nelson Mandela’s companion Ahmed Kathrada and Marwan’s courageous wife Fadwa Barghouthi from Mandela’s former cell on Robben Island. The campaign has received the support of eight Nobel Peace Prize laureates, 115 governments, dozens of former heads of state and governments, hundreds of parliamentarians, and thousands of intellectuals, artists, activists, and citizens – becoming the widest international campaign for the freedom of Palestinian prisoners and of the Palestinian people. Recently, Marwan has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by two Nobel Peace laureates, Archbishop Desmond Tutu

and Adolfo Perez Esquivel, prominent Belgian parliamentarians, the Arab parliament, the chair of the Arab Interparliamentary Union, the Tunisian parliament, prominent Moroccan parliamentarians, and the chair of the Palestinian National Council. These nominations from four continents send a powerful message: The struggle for freedom is not incompatible with peace. Occupation is.

Marwan Barghouthi was not present for the birth of his four children because he was either detained, deported, or being hunted. He was not there when they graduated from school or university, nor for their weddings or the birth of his granddaughters. He was raising hope, however, behind bars. He completed his PhD in jail and now focuses his attention on ensuring that other prisoners are allowed to pursue their studies. He has continued to assume his duties as a leader. In 2006, he elaborated the National Conciliation Document of the Prisoners, which was endorsed by imprisoned leaders

of Palestinian factions and which has become a program of Palestinian national unity still relevant today. He has called for all-inclusive resistance against the occupation and apartheid, and demands that every Palestinian be allowed to play his/her role, including through mass popular resistance and the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. A democrat, a progressive, and a firm believer in human rights, including women’s rights, Marwan is an icon of the struggle for freedom not only from occupation, but from oppression, injustice, and discrimination in general. As such and at this time, Marwan is a much-needed figure in Palestine, the region, and the world. He is the Mandela of this era.

*By Majed Banya*

*Majed Banya is a diplomat and general coordinator of the International Campaign for the Freedom of Marwan Barghouthi and All Palestinian Prisoners.*

*A mural at Qalandia Checkpoint.*

