

We asked the Israeli Embassy in London whether they wished to respond to Mahmoud's allegations of torture. We asked: -

- Firstly, does Israel recognise the right of Palestinians to have a national football team and other national sports teams?
- Secondly, Mahmoud says he was tortured when he was held in Israeli prisons and detention facilities between 2009 and 2012. Would you like to respond to that allegation?
- Thirdly, Mahmoud expressed concern that he and other sports people have been/are being deliberately targeted by the Israeli authorities—both in terms of being detained, imprisoned and tortured, and also in being denied exit visas so they can go to play matches. What is your view on that?

The Israeli Embassy didn't answer our questions but did respond with this statement:

*To describe Mahmoud Sarsak as simply “a Palestinian footballer” is plainly insulting to footballers. Mr Sarsak was arrested on the basis of information pointing to his involvement in military activities of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Rafah. This included the planting of explosive devices, recruiting and training terrorist cells, and maintaining contacts with PIJ’s militant leaders. PIJ has continuously fired rockets at Israelis and has claimed responsibility for several terrorist attacks. Sarsak’s defining characteristic is unfortunately, his terror activity and not the football he may play in his spare time.*

*What’s at stake here is not the right of Palestinians to a football team, but rather the misuse of sports in order to cloak terror activity. As recently as two months ago, on April 28, 2014, another Palestinian national soccer team player, [Samah Fares Muhamed Maravawas](#), was arrested upon the team’s return from Qatar. He admitted to meeting an operative of the Hamas military wing, and receiving from him a mobile phone and written messages for Hamas operatives in the West Bank. Israel subsequently filed a complaint with FIFA, to protest the cynical use of sports visas by the Palestinians, in order to carry out terror activities.*

Mahmoud Sarsak has [never been charged with any of the offences](#) listed in the Embassy's response.