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ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: UNITED NATIONS CALLS FOR HALT TO TORTURE

Amnesty International welcomed the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture's conclusion today that Israel's interrogation practices constitute torture. The human rights organization backed the Committee's call on the Israeli government to cease using these practices immediately.

The Committee stated that interrogation practices used systematically by Israel's General Security Service (GSS) such as shackling in painful positions, sleep deprivation, hooding, playing raucous music, threats including death threats and violent shaking of detainees constituted torture.

"Amnesty International has publicly -- and for many years -- raised its concerns about the interrogation methods used by the GSS, today's decision in Geneva means that the government can no longer deny that its treatment of detainees under interrogation constitutes torture," the organization said.

Many of the arguments made by the Israeli delegation to the Committee focussed on the special security problems Israel experiences. The Committee recognized these problems but said that these could not be a justification for torture, and asked Israel to incorporate the provisions of the Convention against Torture into Israeli law and to prepare its next periodic report, already overdue, by 1 September 1997.

The Committee also asked Israel to publish the secret guidelines which define what methods GSS interrogators are allowed to use and which are believed to give details on administering the methods described above. Israel in the past has refused to make these guidelines public, claiming that suspects will be able to prepare themselves to withstand interrogation.

"What is more likely is that if published, the secret guidelines would prove a severe embarrassment to the government, since they appear to be detailed instructions on methods which constitute torture and ill-treatment," Amnesty International said.

The organization called on the Israeli government to take immediate action to put the recommendations made by the Committee against Torture into effect.

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