

**Commission on Human Rights, 58th Session, 18 March - 26 April
2002**

**Tuesday 26 March 2002
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**Agenda item 8: Question of the violation of human rights in the
occupied Arab territories, including Palestine
ORAL STATEMENT BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL**

Chairperson,

In the recent negotiations for a ceasefire in Israel and the Occupied Territories there has been much mention of "security", little or none of human rights. Yet human rights are at the heart of this conflict and if human rights are not firmly on the agenda of the ceasefire talks there can be no durable ceasefire and no sustainable peace. Palestinians and Israelis will continue to be slaughtered in the alleyways of refugee camps and the streets of Israeli towns.

Armed Palestinians have breached fundamental principles of international humanitarian law on numerous occasions. It is not acceptable to deliberately target civilians, to let off a bomb where women and children are standing, to shoot a girl on a street, to arbitrarily target cars on roads or to kill people who are held as prisoners.

These actions are shocking. Yet they can never justify the human rights violations and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions which, over the past 18 months, have been committed daily, hourly, even every minute, by the Israeli authorities against Palestinians. Israeli forces have consistently carried out killings when no lives were in danger. The Israeli authorities' failure to carry out proper investigations into unlawful killings sends the message that Palestinian lives are cheap. More than 600 Palestinian homes have been systematically demolished, making thousands homeless, the vast majority children. More than 100 checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza have not stopped suicide bombings. The closures of towns and villages deny freedom of movement and appear to be set up to harass, collectively punish, intimidate and humiliate the Palestinian people.

Last week three Amnesty International delegates investigated the Israeli army's recent attacks on towns, including refugee camps. In each instance tanks had entered the area, rolling over cars, running over walls, breaking down house and shop fronts. Heavy fire was used against densely-populated residential areas. Homes of the families of "wanted" men or suicide bombers were blown up, causing severe structural damage to houses all around.

In the camps curfews were imposed and electricity, water and telephones cut off for up to nine days. In several camps male Palestinians between 15 and 45 were ordered to report to an assembly point and hundreds were arrested. For the first 24 hours they were handcuffed, blindfolded, given no food, no blanket, and not allowed to go to the toilet. Ten days afterwards

about 100 of more than 2,500 arbitrarily arrested remained in detention. Again, in treatment apparently intended to hurt and degrade the population, Israeli soldiers who occupied apartments had systematically trashed them: clothes were torn, cupboards emptied on the floor, TV sets hurled down stairs, and a copy of the Qur'an was torn into pieces and scattered on the floor. An independent military advisor, one of Amnesty International's delegates, said: "Either the Israeli army is totally undisciplined or they have been ordered to disobey the laws of war".

During the incursions the IDF unlawfully killed six medical aid workers, including two doctors. Ambulances, including those of the ICRC, have been consistently shot at. Such attacks on the fundamental principle of medical neutrality are flagrant violations of the Geneva Conventions. The director of the Red Crescent at Tulkarem told delegates that it was now safer to transport patients by taxi than by ambulance.

Chairperson,

The Commission on Human Rights must send a strong message to all governments involved in the peace process that human rights can not be neglected. It is more than a year since the findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry called for urgent deployment of international human rights monitors. With more than 1,000 Palestinians and more than 300 Israelis killed, including hundreds of Palestinian and Israeli children, it is now clearer than ever that the paralysis of the international community in delaying the setting up of such protection is sacrificing the lives and human rights of Palestinians and the lives of Israelis. Amnesty International urges members of the Commission to make every effort to reach a consensus on all resolutions. Security can only be achieved through full respect for human rights, not at their expense.

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