

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 15/027/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 106
25 April 2005

Israel/Occupied Territories: Israeli authorities must put an immediate end to settler violence

Amnesty International calls on the Israeli authorities to investigate recent incidents of poisoning of Palestinian fields and the increasingly frequent attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian villagers in the West Bank. Such acts must not be allowed to continue.

In recent weeks, toxic chemicals have repeatedly been spread on fields located near the villages of Tuwani, Umm Faggara and Kharruba in the southern Hebron region.

Scores of sheep as well as gazelles and other animals have been contaminated by the toxins and several have died. Palestinian farmers have been forced to quarantine their flocks and stop using the milk, cheese and meat from them, effectively depriving them of their livelihood. Since the first poison was discovered near Tuwani on 22 March 2005, more fields have been targeted in the same region.

In the days prior to the first field poisoning incident in Tuwani, a security guard from the nearby Israeli settlement Ma'on had reportedly told villagers that he wanted Palestinian farmers to stop grazing their flocks near the settlement and that, if they did not agree to this, he and the settlers had ways to make them stop.

Analyses carried out by the Center for Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences at Bir Zeit University and by the Israeli Nature Protection Authority have confirmed that two types of toxic chemicals have been spread in large quantities in the area. The toxic chemicals are *2-Fluoracetamide* which is banned in several countries including Israel and severely restricted in international trade, and *Brodifacoum*, an anticoagulant used as rodenticide.

On 12 April 2005 one of these toxins was also found in the Northern West Bank village of Yasouf, in a field located near the entrance to the Israeli settlement Tapuah, and near the place where the Israeli army had just re-opened the road connecting Yasouf to the main road. The road leading to Yasouf had been kept closed to Palestinians for years, forcing people to take a long detour to access the village.

The areas where the toxic chemicals have been found are located in Area C, which is under full control of the Israeli authorities; Palestinian Authority security forces are forbidden by Israel from operating in these areas. To date, the Israeli authorities have not cleaned the toxic chemicals from the affected areas, leaving the task to Palestinian farmers and international and Israeli peace activists. They also have not taken the necessary measures to investigate the matter with a view to bringing those responsible to justice.

Recently Israeli settlers have stepped up attacks and threats against Palestinian farmers and villagers in these and other West Bank areas, preventing Palestinians from accessing their land. In recent months, repeated physical assaults by Israeli settlers from Ma'on and the nearby settlement outpost of Havat Ma'on on Palestinian farmers and on international peace activists and human rights workers, including Amnesty International staff, have not been investigated by the Israeli police. Those responsible for these attacks enjoy impunity.

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