

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 15/029/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 066
22 March 2004

Israel/Occupied Territories: Amnesty International strongly condemns the assassination of Sheikh Yassin

Amnesty International condemns the extrajudicial execution, by the Israeli army, of Hamas' leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin this morning in the Gaza Strip. The attack also resulted in the unlawful killing of seven other Palestinians and the injury of many more.

"Once again Israel has chosen to violate international law instead of using alternative lawful means. Sheikh Yassin could have been arrested and prosecuted. The Israeli army has arrested tens of thousands of Palestinians in frequent raids in refugee camps, towns and villages throughout the Gaza Strip and West Bank in the past two years," Amnesty International said.

"The assassination of Sheikh Yassin is likely to further escalate the spiral of violence which has claimed the lives of some 2,500 Palestinians and 900 Israelis, most of them civilians, in the past three and a half years."

The 66-year-old Sheikh Yassin, who was paralyzed and wheelchair-bound, was assassinated by Israeli army helicopter-launched missiles as he was leaving the mosque after dawn prayers in Gaza City.

Sheikh Yassin was previously arrested in 1989 by the Israeli army and was sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of ordering the killing of Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israeli security and intelligence services.

He was subsequently released by Israel in exchange for two Israeli intelligence agents who had tried to assassinate a Hamas leader in Jordan and who were detained there.

Israel has resorted to extrajudicial executions for several years without offering proof of guilt or right of defence. Some 200 Palestinians have been assassinated by the Israeli army in the past three and a half years. Such attacks have also resulted in the unlawful killing of more than 100 bystanders, including dozens of children. Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned these acts as unlawful.

Amnesty International calls on Israel to put an immediate end to its policy of assassinations. The organization calls on Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups to immediately stop targeting Israeli civilians in indiscriminate suicide bombings and other attacks. The Palestinian Authority must also deploy its utmost efforts to prevent such attacks by Palestinian armed groups.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>