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Israel: Torture still used systematically as Israel presents its report to the Committee Against Torture

In a letter sent this week to the Committee Against Torture (CAT), Amnesty International has described how Israel continues to use interrogation methods in defiance of international human rights law and the Committee's own recommendations.

Such methods include forcing detainees to remain in painful positions (*shabeh*), sleep deprivation, hooding, playing raucous music, threats including death threats and violent shaking which can cause death,

In May 1997, after examining a special report by Israel, the Committee found that these interrogation practices, used by Israel's General Security Service (GSS), constituted torture and that their use violates Article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Convention).

Today, representatives of the Israeli Government present a report to the Committee. During an open session, the Committee will question the representatives about the report and ask supplementary clarifications.

"In May 1997, the Committee against Torture made four substantive recommendations to Israel after considering Israel's report. None of these recommendations has been implemented by the Israeli Government," Amnesty International said.

The Committee recommended that Israel should stop using interrogation methods that violate the Convention. Amnesty International has, however, continued to receive reliable reports that detainees have been tortured during interrogation.

Ashraf Rafiq Nasrallah, a Palestinian, was arrested by Israeli security forces on 1 November. During his interrogation by the GSS, he was held in *shabeh* with only short breaks for meals and one night spent in a cell until 5 November. Ashraf Nasrallah was forced during these periods to sit on a small sloping chair about 30 centimetres high, a technique which can cause extreme pains. His hands and his legs were shackled behind him. A sack was kept over his head and loud music was played continuously. On several occasions GSS interrogators forced Ashraf Nasrallah to squat balancing on his toes. Whenever he tried to stand up, his interrogators would force him to return to the position.

The Committee also recommended that Israel incorporate the Convention into its law. Israel has failed to do this, despite the opportunity presented by the Israeli Government's tabling of a bill in the Knesset earlier this year to regulate the GSS.

“In fact the draft GSS law itself would violate the Convention in various ways, for example, by limiting criminal liability for acts of torture and ill-treatment perpetrated by GSS agents,” Amnesty International said.

"Israel is the only country on earth where torture and ill-treatment are legally sanctioned. The Committee must send a clear message that such practices are a flagrant violation of the Convention and their continued use will not be tolerated."
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