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Palestinian Authority: New unity government must put civilian protection above politics

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan today wrote to the Palestinian President and Prime Minister calling on them to make it a top priority of the new unity government to create a security force that respects the human rights of all Palestinian people and operates within the rule of law.

The two leaders must take action to break the pattern of impunity which has fostered spiralling inter-factional violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territories between armed groups and security forces loyal to President Abbas' Fatah party and Prime Minister Haniyeh's Hamas party.

"Any agreement between the two sides must address the human rights abuses their forces are committing and ensure an end to the pattern of impunity that, for far too long, has allowed the gunmen to walk free and repeat their crimes," said Irene Khan. "The leaders of Fatah and Hamas must put their own houses in order and stop fostering the internecine violence that has shattered so many Palestinian lives."

Amnesty International called on the two leaders to take prompt action to:

- Ensure that the recruitment and training of members of the security forces and the prosecutorial authorities is free from partisan political control and that they are accountable to the community they serve;

- Ensure that no groups or individuals are allowed to use or carry firearms/ammunition in a manner which may jeopardize the security of others;

- Issue clear and unambiguous instructions to all members of the security forces that anyone who abuses their power or violates human rights will be brought to account, including if appropriate, criminal prosecution;

- Put in place a mechanism to ensure independent, impartial and non-partisan oversight of the security forces;

- Take measures to ensure that all killings, abductions and any other attacks against civilians are investigated promptly, thoroughly and impartially, and that those responsible for such crimes are brought to justice in proceedings which comply with internationally recognized standards for fair trial and without recourse to the death penalty.

In the past six weeks alone, more than 80 people have been killed and others injured in armed attacks and clashes between the two sides; many of the victims have been armed militants but unarmed civilians

have been among those killed, including no fewer than 10 children, and scores more have been wounded. Both sides have also abducted people to hold as bargaining chips in the conflict.

"Those responsible for the violence have included members of rival Palestinian security forces, including the Presidential Guards loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Executive Force formed by the Palestinian Authority's Hamas government," said Irene Khan. "Instead of upholding the law and confronting violence by Palestinian armed groups, these forces have joined in and exacerbated the problem."

The new government of unity must ensure that all unlawful killings, abductions and any other attacks against civilians – be they Palestinians, Israelis or nationals of other countries – are investigated promptly, thoroughly and impartially, and that those responsible for such crimes are brought to justice.

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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>

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