

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 15/035/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 068
24 March 2004

Israel/Occupied Territories: Children must not be used by armed groups

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about reports that earlier today a 16-year-old Palestinian child was found to be carrying explosives when attempting to pass through the Israeli army checkpoint at Huwara, at the entrance of the West Bank town of Nablus.

Reports indicate that the boy was wearing an explosive belt, which would suggest that he was knowingly carrying it. According to Israeli army reports the boy may have intended to detonate the explosive belt, and thus commit suicide, near soldiers manning the checkpoint.

Last week, Israeli soldiers discovered a bag of explosives in the possession of an 11-year old Palestinian child at the same checkpoint. The boy, who regularly carried bags for travellers from one side of the checkpoint to the other, was reported not to have been aware that one of the bags on his cart contained explosives.

"Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned suicide bombings and other attacks against civilians by Palestinian armed groups as crimes against humanity. Using children to carry out or assist in armed attacks of any kind is an abomination. We call on the Palestinian leadership to publicly denounce these practices."

"Palestinian armed groups, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad and al-Aqsa Martyrs's brigades, must put an immediate end to the use or involvement of any kind of children in armed activity."

Background Information

In the past three years there have been other cases in which Palestinian children have been used by Palestinian armed groups to carry out or attempt to carry out suicide bombings or other attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers.

In January a 17-year-old Palestinian detonated an explosive belt he was wearing as he was being tracked down by Israeli soldiers, killing himself and without hurting anyone else. The boy apparently intended to carry out a suicide attack to revenge the killing the previous week by the Israeli army of his 15-year-old brother and his cousin, neither of whom were armed when they were shot dead by Israeli soldiers. He had reportedly been given the explosive belt by members of the Palestinian armed group Islamic Jihad.

Palestinian armed groups have pressured families of those who have been killed while carrying

out attacks, including children, not to condemn but to welcome and endorse their relatives' actions.

Public Document

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