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Palestinian Authority: New Government must end impunity for lawlessness

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Amnesty International is calling on the new unity government of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to take immediate steps to end impunity and enhance the protection of human rights in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The new government should take concrete measures to end the lawlessness and political faction-fighting which has blighted the lives of Palestinians living in these areas, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis to which they have been exposed through Israeli closures and other controls on movement. In particular, it should ensure that the security forces are required to uphold the law, not break it for partisan reasons, and that those responsible for attacks on civilians, abductions and other gross human rights violations are identified, arrested and brought to justice in trials that meet international standards of fairness .

The organization made this call in the wake of the attempted abduction of a leading United Nations (UN) official by armed men on 16 March and the kidnapping on 12 March of BBC journalist based in the Gaza Strip. Alan Johnston, the journalist, continues to be held hostage while last Friday's attempt to abduct John Ging, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Field Office in Gaza, was an unprecedented attack on a senior UN official carried out by Palestinian gunmen. His car was fired on during the abduction attempt but he and those with him escaped injury.

These latest attacks follow repeated clashes in recent months between security forces and armed political groups aligned to Fatah, headed by PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and Hamas, which formed the government of the PA after it won a majority of seats in the Palestinian elections of January 2006. More than 90 people have been killed in such clashes over the past year, many of them armed men but also including civilians, some of them children. The violence has continued, though on a lesser scale, since the two sides concluded the Mecca Agreement, under Saudi Arabian auspices, on 8 February 2007. This led on 15 March to the formation of a new unity government for the PA, comprising representatives of both Fatah and Hamas and others chosen for their independence and ability. However, the situation remains tense and fragile: since Alan Johnston's abduction on 12 March at least four Palestinians have been killed, several have been kidnapped (mostly for a few hours only) and some 20 people have been injured in clashes and armed attacks in the Gaza Strip. Those killed and injured include women and children. No one has been brought to justice for any of the abductions or killings over the past year.

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