

23 May 2000

LEBANON/ISRAEL : Amnesty International welcomes Khiam releases, calls for respect for human rights standards

Amnesty International today welcomed the liberation of 144 Lebanese detained as hostages for up to 15 years in Khiam Detention Centre by Israel and its proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA).

For 16 years, Lebanese detainees have been held without charge or trial and systematically tortured in Khiam Detention Centre. For seven years the detainees were held cut off from the outside world, even banned access to their families and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

"At last the prisoners, men, women and even children, have left this centre of torture and injustice", Amnesty International said.

"We are now calling on the Israeli Government to free the remaining hostages held in Israel including Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd and Mustafa al-Dirani.

Soldiers of the SLA throughout Israel's self-styled "security zone" surrendered to the Lebanese army or to Hizbullah, an armed group which has been leading the armed opposition to Israel and the SLA in the occupied zone with the tacit acceptance of the Lebanese Government. Hundreds of former SLA soldiers and families of those who had worked in Israel sought shelter in Israel.

The Lebanese Government has said that those who bore arms for the SLA will be tried according to Lebanese law and that it will cooperate fully with the United Nations. Amnesty International stresses that the State is responsible for the human rights of all people living under its jurisdiction, and accordingly urges the Lebanese government to ensure that administrative personnel are deployed to ensure the life, liberty and security of all the people in south Lebanon.

Background

Mustafa al-Dirani has been held since May 1994 in incommunicado detention, without contact with his family or the ICRC; Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd was only allowed to see the ICRC and exchange letters with his family about three months ago.

The speed of the Israeli withdrawal and the SLA collapse has taken observers by surprise. On 8 May 2000, Amnesty International issued a 13-point program of respect for human rights to be observed by all parties to the conflict. The organization urged among other things that:

- No one should launch direct attacks on civilians or civilian objects or indiscriminate attacks under any circumstances, whether or not in reprisal.
- No one should carry out extra-judicial executions or other unlawful killings, including killing of those who are wounded, have surrendered or been made prisoner.
- No one should torture any person under any circumstances.
- Lebanese detainees in Khiam Detention Centre and in Israel should be freed.

· Those who have committed grave human rights violations should be brought to justice.

· No one should be brought to trial except in fair trials and on recognizably criminal charges; the death penalty should never be imposed;

· No asylum seeker should be refouled to a country where he or she might suffer grave violations of human rights.

ENDS.../

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