

Israel / Palestinian Authority: security must not be used as a pretext for human rights abuses

Amnesty International is today calling on Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the United States, to ensure that human rights are not once again thrown overboard in the Israeli-Palestinian security agreement to be negotiated tomorrow.

“Flagrant violations of human rights are committed daily in the region ‘in the name of security’,” said Amnesty International. “Once again we ask those negotiating to recognize that enduring peace and security are not built on flouting law and justice but on real respect for human rights.”

The security agreement under negotiation is intended to address Israel's complaints that the PA is not doing enough to combat "terrorism". The PA has reportedly been insisting that the agreement also impose obligations on Israel to act against Jewish extremists who attack Palestinians.

"Given the wide scale nature of past violations by Israel and the Palestinian Authority on the pretext of "security" any security agreement must contain explicit and detailed provisions to ensure respect for human rights, especially the right to physical integrity, the right to security of the person and the right to receive a fair trial," Amnesty International urged.

Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have used the pretext of "security" to justify human rights abuses. In its name, Israel has effectively legalised torture, held people under administrative detention and allowed the security forces to carry out extra-judicial and other unlawful killings with impunity.

Again in the name of "security" the PA has carried out mass arbitrary arrests against alleged members of *Hamas* and Islamic *Jihad*, often after suicide bombings killing Israeli civilians. A State Security Court established in 1995 has convicted suspected Islamist activists of a wide range of offences after grossly unfair trials, often only lasting minutes. Several hundred of them are now being held in Palestinian prisons without charge or trial. Some have now been there for nearly four years, with no indication of when they may be released.

Such abuses by the PA have often been condoned or even encouraged by the United States. PA officials have told Amnesty International that they have been placed under external pressure to detain suspected supporters of *Hamas* and Islamic *Jihad*. Both Israel and the United States endorsed the creation of the State Security Court in 1995.

The United States has been brokering the negotiations. The CIA station chief in Israel has reportedly been helping to draft a security agreement since last year. Last week the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was in Israel for discussions about the agreement with Israeli and Palestinian security chiefs.

"Given its pivotal role in the negotiations for a security agreement, the United States cannot

shirk its responsibility to ensure that this agreement guarantees respect for human rights," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is also calling for the terms of any concluded security agreement to be publicized in full, to be consistent with internationally recognized human rights standards.

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