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**ISRAEL/SOUTH LEBANON: ISRAEL'S FORGOTTEN HOSTAGES -- LEBANESE NATIONALS HELD UNLAWFULLY FOR YEARS IN DETENTION**

Most of them do not know why they were picked out for prolonged secret detention. Some have now been held for more than 12 years without charge or trial, while their captors wait for an opportunity to use them as a bargaining chip. Are we talking of the activities of a terrorist group? No: we are talking about the forgotten hostages held by the State of Israel.

"Lebanese detainees are being held by the Israeli authorities in a limbo where they have no information as to when -- or if -- they will be freed," Amnesty International said. "It is unacceptable that a state should continue to hold human beings as pawns, outside any legal framework."

In a new report issued today -- *Israel's Forgotten Hostages* -- Amnesty International details the cases of 21 Lebanese nationals abducted from Lebanon and secretly moved to Israel. Nine have been held for up to 10 years without charge or trial, and the other 12 for up to nine years after the expiry of prison sentences passed down by Israeli courts. More than 130 others are held in Khiam detention centre -- run by the South Lebanon Army (SLA) in the "security zone" Israel occupies in South Lebanon. Some have been detained without trial since 1985.

The Israeli government denies it has any influence over Khiam; however, as the occupying power, it is responsible according to international law for what happens in the "security zone". Moreover, Israel's funding and control of the SLA is not in doubt.

"Those captured and held in Israel and South Lebanon are being held as hostages by the State of Israel to be used as a bargaining chip with Islamist militia groups," Amnesty International said.

The Israeli government and the SLA have more than once stated that the release of those detained in Khiam and Israel is conditional on the release of, or accounting for, Israeli soldiers missing in action in Lebanon. This message was repeated to an Amnesty International delegation in 1996 by the then Deputy Minister of Defence, Ori Orr. Furthermore, a series of releases from Khiam detention centre took place in 1991 and 1996 in exchange for information on the deaths of Israeli soldiers believed to have been taken prisoners by *Hizbullah*.

"The Israeli government has written back to Amnesty International members saying that these people are 'terrorists' and they are holding them 'according to the law,'" Amnesty International said. "Laws, such as Israel's Emergency Powers (Detention) Law, which allow people to be detained for years after the expiry of their sentences or without trial violate their fundamental human rights. Those accused of "terrorism" have the right to be brought to fair trial. If the Israeli government is not prepared to do this the detainees should be immediately released."

In March 1997, Amnesty International sent a 13-page memorandum to the Israeli Prime Minister detailing the cases contained in this report. So far, no reply has been received.

**Illustrative cases**

Hasan Hijazi was only 16 years old when he was taken from his village in South Lebanon on 1 September 1986. He said he was beaten and held in Khiam in solitary confinement for six weeks. After five months he was transferred to Israel where he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment in a secret trial. He should have been released in 1989 but, eight years later, he remains detained in Ramleh Prison.

Ghassan al-Dirani, physically and psychologically sick, has also been held without charge or trial for 10 years, much of the time isolated from the others in a prison hospital. His mother used a false passport to try to enter Israel to see the son she had not seen for so long. She was immediately expelled. An Israeli government spokesman said: "As long as there is no news of Ron Arad [an Israeli navigator captured by an armed group during the war in Lebanon] there will be no meetings with Lebanese detainees in Israel and no information about the detainees will be released".

The only woman now known to be held in Khiam detention centre, Suha Beshara, attempted to kill Antoine Lahad, leader of the SLA in 1989. She has never been brought to trial. But others have been detained even longer and the reasons for their detention are not even known. 'Abd al-Karim Hamid, a student, and Naser Abu 'Alaywa, a worker, have both been detained without charge or trial since July 1985. For seven years, until 1995, neither families nor the International Committee of the Red Cross were allowed to visit the detainees in Khiam.

The missing Israeli soldiers include Ron Arad, an Israeli airman who "disappeared" after having been captured by a Lebanese muslim militia in 1986. More than 90 hostages held by armed groups in Lebanon are believed to have been held in retaliation for four Iranians -- three diplomats and one journalist -- who "disappeared" after being detained by a Lebanese Christian Militia in 1982. Thousands of others, Lebanese and Palestinians, were abducted by various forces and "disappeared" during the conflict in Lebanon -- their families still do not know if they are alive or dead.

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**For further information, to receive a copy of the report or to arrange an interview (in Arabic, English, French or Spanish) please contact Soraya Bermejo, Amnesty International Press Office, on +44 171 413 5562**