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2 AUGUST 1996

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR END TO TORTURE FOLLOWING DEATH IN CUSTODY

Amnesty International condemns this week's death of Mahmud Jumayel, the seventh person to die, apparently after torture, in the custody of the Palestinian Authority (PA) over the past two years, and is calling for an independent public inquiry.

"These seven deaths in custody show mounting evidence of torture which appears to be condoned by the PA and senior security officers," Amnesty International said today.

Mahmud Jumayel, a member of the "Fatah Hawks" faction was arrested in December 1995 soon after Israel's handover of Nablus to Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) rule. He was held in detention in Jericho where he was last visited by his family on 26 July 1996. He was then transferred to Jnaid prison near Nablus where he was interrogated by the PA naval police.

On 27 July he was taken to hospital in Nablus unconscious and suffering from multiple injuries. From there he was transferred to Ramallah hospital where he was pronounced brain dead. He died on 31 July, shortly after being transferred to Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem. No autopsy was carried out at the request of his family.

Amnesty International welcomes the fact that PA President Yasser Arafat has ordered an investigation into the death of Mahmud Jumayel, as well as the arrest of the three naval officers allegedly involved in the torture which apparently led to his death. The PA legislative council's move to set up an independent commission of inquiry and demands that the PA publish its own findings are also welcomed.

However, Amnesty International points out the unsatisfactory outcome of the previous investigations ordered by the PA after many of the previous deaths in custody. The process and conclusions of each investigation have remained secret. On the two occasions when those involved in torture leading to death in custody were said to have been sanctioned, no details were ever given about their names and any trials of security personnel involved were held in secret.

The investigation announced by President Arafat, to be carried out by the military attorney general, gives rise to fears that this is another death in danger of being covered up when the initial anger has died down.

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