

AI INDEX: MDE/15/55/96  
News Service 150/96  
16 AUGUST 1996

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR AN END TO  
TORTURE AND POLITICAL DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL

Following a visit by Amnesty International delegates to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in July and August, Amnesty International today made eight specific recommendations to end the torture of detainees. The international human rights organization also called for the release of hundreds of detainees, most arrested soon after suicide bombings in Israel in February and March 1996, if they are not to be promptly charged or tried.

“Evidence of widespread torture by branches of the PA’s security forces is incontrovertible”, said Amnesty International. “Yet no serious measures have been taken by the PA to halt it. Implementation of these recommendations would be a first step in ending an increasingly bad situation.”

Amnesty International delegates, who included a medical doctor and the Director of the organization’s Norwegian Section, met victims of torture, lawyers, human rights groups and chiefs of branches of the security forces during a two-week visit to the PA. Victims told of severe beatings, burning by cigarettes, suspension often in contorted positions while being beaten and prolonged sleep deprivation. Some of those tortured had made formal complaints to the Attorney General; others had sent letters of complaint to President Yasser Arafat and members of the Palestinian Authority. No investigation of their allegations was made; some were threatened with reprisals if they continued to complain.

“Torture, detention without charge or trial, complainants ignored or threatened with reprisals, a multiplicity of security services with no accountability - all this has created a climate of fear where gross human rights abuses are becoming systematic”, said Amnesty International.

“The arrest on 12 August of Muhammad Dahman, the Director of the Gaza Office of the human rights organization *al-Damir*, after issuing a communique on a death following police interrogation is yet another sign that the PA prefers to cover up abuses rather than to redress them.”

Since July 1995 at least eight people have died in the custody of PA security services in circumstances where torture may have played a part in their deaths. On numerous occasions inquiries have been announced, but no report has ever been made public. The death of Mahmud Jumayel on 30 July after severe beating, suspension and burning with electric elements was followed by a summary trial before the state security court of his alleged torturers. However, the

trial was grossly unfair: the defendants had only a military state-appointed lawyer who offered no defence; no witnesses were called and no information was given which might elucidate who had ordered the torture.

Amnesty International's eight recommendations are as follows:

➤ **Public condemnation of torture.**

President Arafat, on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, should make it clear, publicly and to all law-enforcement bodies, that torture will never be tolerated under any circumstances.

➤ **Immediate Access and Appearance before a Judge**

Families, lawyers and doctors should have immediate access to detainees. Detainees should be brought before a judge within the legal limit of 48 hours.

➤ **Full and Public Inquiries**

No report of any inquiry into human rights abuses under the PA has ever been made public. Amnesty International calls on the Palestinian Authority to set up a commission of inquiry made up of persons known for their independence, integrity and attachment to human rights to investigate the use of torture by the security services. The commission should have the power to visit all detention centres and prisons, to take evidence from detainees and other interested persons, and to ensure the protection of witnesses. Its report should be made public.

➤ **Freedom for Human Rights Defenders**

Fear of reprisals is creating a climate in which torture can flourish. Human rights defenders, lawyers, and all Palestinians should have the right to raise individual cases of human rights abuse and general concern without fear.

➤ **No Impunity for Torturers**

Those who have ordered or carried out torture should be brought to justice in fair trials.

➤ **End Prolonged Political Detention without Trial**

Hundreds of detainees have been detained for more than six months without charge or trial. Some political detainees have been detained for up to two years without trial. Amnesty International calls on the PA to free immediately all prisoners of conscience. All political detainees should be released unless they are to be promptly brought to trial on recognizably criminal charges.

➤ **Halt Trials by State Security Courts**

The State Security Courts do not provide the guarantees for a fair trial. State security court trials should be halted and new fair trials should be held for those already convicted.

➤ **Access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)**

For humanitarian reasons, the ICRC should be granted full, regular and confidential access to all security detainees in detention centres and prisons under the control of the PA.

Amnesty International also calls on all countries giving aid and training to the PA security services to do all in their power to ensure that these recommendations are put into force by the PA.

In an interview on 15 August with Jan Egeland, Secretary of State in the Norwegian Foreign Office, President Yasser Arafat is quoted in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* as saying: "I will not tolerate torture." He said that he had set up a Presidential committee to investigate allegations of torture. Amnesty International is seeking information about the composition powers and terms of reference of this committee. President Arafat also stated that he had given the ICRC access to Palestinian prisons.

On 13 August another Palestinian detainee, Khaled Habal, aged 66, arrested over a land dispute, died, apparently after severe torture. Amnesty International urges the Palestinian Authority to hold a public inquiry in this death.

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