

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 21/08/97

UA 287/97

"Disappearance"/Fear for Safety/
Fear of Torture

29 August 1997

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY Shafiq Muhammad Hassan 'Abd al-Wahhab, 52, Real Estate Agent, father of five children

Shafiq Muhammad Hassan 'Abd al-Wahhab has not been seen since he was arrested by the Palestinian military intelligence (*istikhbarat*) on 21 June 1997. Concern for his safety is heightened by the recent deaths of four Palestinian land dealers, and the detention and reported ill-treatment of others.

A man, stating that he was a member of *istikhbarat*, visited Shafiq 'Abd al-Wahhab in his office on 21 June and asked him to come to the headquarters in Ramallah.

Another alleged *istikhbarat* member waiting outside informed Shafiq 'Abd al-Wahhab's wife that they were going to question her husband about an arrest warrant and would be back in five minutes. When he failed to return, his wife visited the offices of different branches of the Palestinian security services in Ramallah and Jericho. They all denied holding her husband. In July, she submitted formal requests through her lawyer to numerous authorities, including the Palestinian police, the military intelligence and other security forces, the Attorney General, the Mayor of Ramallah, the Ministry of Justice, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat. She was reportedly informed by telephone that a commission of inquiry had been set up to look into the matter, but received no written answer to any of her requests.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 5 May 1997, Minister of Justice, Freih Abu Middein, announced that the Palestinian Authority would begin using a Jordanian law which provides for the death penalty in cases of Arabs selling land to Jews. The Minister of Justice stated that the "official" position of the Palestinian Authority is to send those accused to a military or civilian court. He reportedly stated: "We have to punish them very strongly, very severely. Everybody now realises the danger of selling land to a Jew."

Amnesty International fears that the statements made by the Minister of Justice appear to constitute permission to security services to commit killings or extrajudicial punishments with impunity (see UA 148/97, MDE 15/25/97, 22 May 1997).

After the Minister's announcement, three land dealers were found killed. They were Farid Bashiti, an East Jerusalem land dealer, Harbi Abu Sara, and 'Ali Jumhur, found on 9, 17 and 31 May respectively. A fourth land dealer, Hakam Qamhawi, held in Jericho Prison for two weeks, died on 15 June in Ramallah Hospital. The death was said to have occurred from an overdose of pills, but Amnesty International's request for an autopsy report has not been answered. In July, the Palestinian Authority announced that it had arrested and was detaining 22 land dealers. Amnesty International has received reports of the torture of some land dealers arrested. Torture methods include being hung by the hands and being beaten until confessions were made.

The Palestinian Authority denied involvement in the killings of the three land dealers. A public statement on 1 June stated that: "While it approves the death sentence against those who betray the land and the people, the Palestinian National Authority utterly rejects any killing without trial and express conviction". In an interview published in *Newsweek* on 8 June, President Yasser

Arafat stated that: "We are absolutely against anyone taking the law into his own hands". A Commission of Inquiry was announced into the killing of the three land dealers. No report of this Commission is known to have been issued.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic or your own language:

- expressing concern at the "disappearance" of Shafiq Muhammad Hassan 'Abd al-Wahhab after he was reportedly arrested by the military intelligence;
- calling on the military intelligence and the Palestinian Authority to immediately inform Shafiq 'Abd al-Wahhab's family of his whereabouts and ensure he is being well treated, and grant him access to his family, lawyer and to an independent doctor;
- calling on the Palestinian Authority to free immediately Shafiq 'Abd al-Wahhab if he is not charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a fair trial according to international standards;
- stating that the death penalty is a violation of the fundamental right to life and requesting that it be rescinded for those who sell land to Jews.

APPEALS TO:

President Yasser Arafat
Palestinian Authority
Al-Muntada

Gaza, Palestinian Authority

Faxes: +972 7 822 365 (ask to send a fax)

Telegrams: President Arafat, Palestinian Authority, Gaza

Salutation: Dear President Arafat

Minister of Justice Mr Freih Abu Meddein
Ministry of Justice
Abu Khadra Building
Omar al-Mukhtar Street

Gaza, Palestinian Authority

Faxes: +972 7 822 236

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Palestinian Authority, Gaza

Salutation: Dear Minister

General Musa Arafat
Head of Military Intelligence services
Ramallah

Faxes: +972 2 998 6579

Telegrams: General Arafat, Istikhbarat, Ramallah

Salutation: Dear General Arafat

COPIES TO:

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights
PO Box 54627
Jerusalem

Via Israel

Fax: +972 2 998 7536

and to diplomatic representatives of Palestinian Authority accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 October 1997.