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Israel/Occupied Territories: Detention and beatings underline degradation of respect for human rights

The detention and beating of a prominent doctor and human rights defender, and the beating of members of an international delegation underlines the Israeli authorities' apparent disregard for basic human rights during the current intifada, Amnesty International said today.

Dr Mustafa Barghouti, President of the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, was arrested on 2 January 2002 after a press conference with the participation of an international delegation including Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and delegates from the USA and many European countries.

Dr Barghouti was arrested as he left the conference -- where he had spoken about the disastrous impact on medical treatment and care of the Israeli closures of towns and villages in the Occupied Territories -- on the grounds that he had no Israeli pass to enter Jerusalem, where he was born. He was released at al-Ram checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah after four hours' detention at the Moscobiye Detention Centre in Jerusalem.

The beating by Israeli border police took place later that day at the al-Ram checkpoint as international delegates protested at attempts to rearrest Dr Barghouti. Dr Barghouti was released after an hour, with a fractured kneecap and various lacerations and bruises on his face and body. Some international delegates, including Italian MEP Luisa Morgantini, suffered bruises and other injuries.

"Dr Mustafa Barghouti, who has a world-wide reputation, has been released. However, he is not the first human rights activist to be ill-treated and arrested -- others remain under administrative detention orders which allow indefinite detention without charge or trial," added the organization.

These include >Abed al-Rahman al-Ahmar, a fieldworker for the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, who was arrested in Jerusalem in May 2001 because he had no pass, and Daoud al-Dar'awi, a staff member of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights, arrested in September 2001, who was placed under administrative detention in October immediately after a judge ordered his release on bail. >Abed al-Rahman al-Ahmar said he was beaten after arrest and both were reportedly subjected to prolonged sleep deprivation in painful positions under interrogation.

"The Israeli army responsible for the beating of Dr Barghouti and international delegates is also responsible for repeatedly shooting and killing Palestinians at checkpoints and during demonstrations when the lives of others were not in danger," Amnesty International said.

More than 700 Palestinians -- including more than 160 children -- have been killed by Israeli security forces since October 2000. Most of these were unlawful killings, yet only the killings of 13 Palestinians with Israeli citizenship in September and October 2000 are being properly investigated.

"The failure to hold proper investigations into every killing has created an atmosphere where nervous or reckless members of the security forces kill or injure Palestinians with impunity," Amnesty International added.

"A new mindset which fully respects human rights will not come into being unless all killings, injuries, instances of ill-treatment and other human rights violations are considered important and adequately investigated," the organization warned.

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