

## **Public Statement**

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**Amnesty International Press Conference  
American Colony Hotel Jerusalem 19 March 19-03-2002  
Statement of Curt Goering, Deputy Executive Director, Amnesty International  
USA**

*My colleagues, Elizabeth Hodgkin, a senior Amnesty International researcher, David Holley, a military advisor, and I have urgently returned to the region to investigate first-hand the escalating human rights abuses in the context of the recent Israeli incursions into Palestinian cities and camps. We have been to Gaza, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Tulkarem and have met with a wide range of individuals, institutions, NGO's, IGO's, and the Palestinian Authority.*

*Our research coincides with the visits of US Vice-President Dick Cheney and US Envoy Anthony Zinni. In all the speeches they have made, we are disturbed that they have not acknowledged the link between human rights, justice and peace, despite what has been unfolding before their eyes in recent days. If US officials are serious about their efforts to reduce the level of violence, it is absolutely vital that they recognize the centrality of human rights to security and lasting peace. If General Zinni does not put human rights squarely on the table with both Israelis and Palestinians he may as well pack his bags now, Without human rights at the heart of a peace process, his efforts will be doomed to fail, and the downward spiral will degenerate even further out of control. And once again Israelis and Palestinians will pay the price for this negligence.*

*The evidence we have gathered about serious human rights violations committed during Israel's incursion into these areas is deeply alarming. Dozens of individuals have been needlessly killed who presented no immediate threat to life or serious injury. At least six medical*

personnel, including two doctors, have been killed, including those who died as a result of direct attacks on ambulances. Further deaths and substantial unnecessary suffering occurred when scores of injured were prevented or obstructed by the IDF from receiving urgently-needed medical attention. At this moment Amnesty International members around the world are calling on the Israeli Government to instruct the IDF to respect medical premises, vehicles and personnel.

Other concerns include the use of heavy weapons in crowded residential areas resulting in large-scale destruction or damage to houses and other objects, the demolition of homes as collective punishment, a pattern of arbitrary arrests of over two thousand Palestinians, some of whom were beaten. Scores are still held in various jails or prisons.

We also collected information about random and arbitrary killings of Israeli civilians committed by armed Palestinian groups and raised this issue with senior Palestinian authorities. Amnesty International also raised its concern about the recent killing of Palestinians suspected of "collaborating" with Israel.

The statements of Ariel Sharon that Palestinians have to be hit hard, they have to be beaten have given a green light to Israel's security forces to commit human rights violations. Indeed, many of the human rights violations we have must been carried out under orders. Instead of encouraging more violations a responsible leader should be demanding accountability and making clear that committing human rights violations are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Finally, the US must recognize its own contribution to human rights abuses raging in this region. We saw the damage caused in Bethlehem University by four US-made TOW anti-tank missiles, and it is difficult to imagine that the strike on the university was not intentional.

*US funding made the new Millennium Building possible. US funding also made possible its devastation.*

*The US continues to supply many weapons which are being used to violate human rights including F-16s and Apache helicopters. There are now many instances where Israel has used US-supplied weapons to commit human rights violations. Such use is therefore a violation of US law, namely the Arms Export Control Act, which prohibits US weapons from being used for non-defensive purposes. It may also be a violation of the Leahy Amendment, which prohibits military funding to any country whose security forces are responsible for gross human rights violations. The US must finally muster the political will to acknowledge its own role in the escalating violence.*

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