

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Israel/Occupied Territories: Conscientious objectors jailed while soldiers who commit grave violations enjoy impunity**

Amnesty International has today written to Shaul Mofaz, Israeli Minister of Defence, to express concern over the imprisonment of Israeli conscripts and reservists who refuse to perform military service or to serve in the Occupied Territories, as they believe that by doing so they would contribute to, or participate in, human rights violations.

Some 180 conscientious objectors and refuseniks have been jailed in the past 26 months.

"Members of the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) who commit grave human rights violations and war crimes, such as killing children and other unarmed civilians, recklessly shooting and shelling densely populated residential areas or blowing up houses on top of people and leaving them to die under the rubble are not brought to justice and held accountable for their acts."

"At the same time conscripts and reservists who refuse to serve, precisely to avoid participating in such acts, are sent to jail for months. What kind of message is such a policy sending to Israeli society?" Amnesty International asked.

The impunity enjoyed by IDF members responsible for human rights violations and the imprisonment of conscientious objectors are grave concerns, each in their own right; the combination of both constitutes an extremely worrying trend.

Conscripts who make it known that they are unwilling to serve on grounds of conscience and because they believe that the army is committing human rights violations are imprisoned, whereas other conscripts are routinely granted deferral or exemption from performing military service on religious grounds.

Draft resisters Jonathan Ben-Artzi and Uri Ya'acovi are presently serving their sixth consecutive prison sentences for refusing to serve in the Israeli army because of their conscientiously held beliefs. They have until now been sentenced to a total of 161 and 134 days respectively.

Amnesty International believes that all conscientious objectors should be given the opportunity to present the grounds of their objection to a decision-making body which is established by law and is impartial and independent.

"The draft resisters and refuseniks who are and have been imprisoned as a result of their

conscientious objection are prisoners of conscience. Those currently detained should be released immediately and unconditionally," the organization said today.

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