

Israel/Occupied Territories: Israel fails to address increasing use of torture

GENEVA -- The Israeli government has failed to address the evidence of increasing use of torture by its law enforcement officials, Amnesty International said today as the United Nations Committee Against Torture prepares to examine the country's third periodic report.

Amnesty International's briefing to the Committee stated that, since the September 1999 High Court of Justice judgement which banned interrogation methods constituting torture, there has been strong evidence that these methods - including sleep deprivation often seated in painful positions; prolonged squatting on haunches; painful handcuffing - are now being used again.

"We regret that notwithstanding the High Court of Justice's 1999 ruling and the Committee Against Torture's clear statement in 1997 that these methods constitute torture, the State of Israel, in its report to the Committee, continues to deny this," says Amnesty International.

"This failure to acknowledge that these methods of interrogation are illegal under Article 1 of the Convention has been an important factor in encouraging their revival, particularly over the past year," says the organization's briefing to the Committee.

In addition detainees have frequently been held in prolonged incommunicado detention for more than 20 days without being given access to lawyers or families; the UN Special Rapporteur on torture stated in 2001 that Israel's use of prolonged incommunicado detention was "itself a practice constituting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment".

In its briefing to the Committee Against Torture Amnesty International raises incidents of torture, prolonged incommunicado detention and brutality against Palestinians by members of the security forces and expresses concern that security force members appear to benefit from impunity for torture or ill-treatment of Palestinians.

The organization stresses that the practice of administrative detention without charge or trial, indefinitely renewable, which the Committee Against Torture raised in 1998 as an apparent breach of the prohibition on cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, still continues.

Amnesty International also called on the Committee Against Torture to declare that the demolition of Palestinian homes constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment under Article 16 of the Convention Against Torture. The European Court of Human Rights has deemed Turkish demolition of houses to constitute inhuman treatment in breach of Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights.

“More than 500 homes have been demolished in the Occupied Territories during the past year, making a minimum of 2,000 Palestinians homeless, the vast majority of them children,” the organization said. “There can be no excuse for inflicting hundreds of human tragedies”.

Amnesty International also considers that other forms of collective punishment carried out by the Israeli authorities, including the prolonged closures of towns, villages and whole areas, denying freedom of movement to Palestinians, and prolonged curfews might also fall under Article 16 of the Convention.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>