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Israeli Government should release all Lebanese hostages

Today's decision by the Israeli Supreme Court that the detention of individuals solely as "bargaining chips" is illegal is a positive step. The authorities should now go a step further and release all 15 Lebanese detainees held as hostages, Amnesty International said today.

"In defiance of international law Israel has been holding Lebanese nationals for years as hostages to barter for information about Israeli servicemen who went missing in action in Lebanon," the organization said. "We regret that it has taken the Supreme Court six years to come to the decision that such detention is illegal."

Israeli Army radio reported that only 13 of the 15 detainees would be released, suggesting that freedom would be denied to Mustafa al-Dirani, kidnapped in 1994, and Shaikh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd, abducted in 1989.

In contravention of international law they have been held in a secret place of detention without access to the International Committee of the Red Cross or their families. Mustafa al-Dirani is at present suing the Israeli Government for torture, including rape, allegedly inflicted after his abduction.

"We consider all 15 detainees -- including Shaikh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd and Mustafa al-Dirani, held for 11 and six years without trial -- as hostages who should be immediately released," urged Amnesty International.

The organization is also urging the Israeli Government to compensate all the hostages for the years of suffering cut off from the outside world.

Background

Ten Lebanese detainees, who continued to be held for up to six years after their prison sentences expired, launched an appeal in 1994 against their continued administrative detention.

In 1997 the Supreme Court ruled that it was legal to hold these detainees as "bargaining chips", a decision believed to be unprecedented in the world. But the Supreme Court decided to allow the appeal to be reheard by an enlarged panel of nine judges.

By May 1999 the Supreme Court had completed rehearing the arguments and announced its intention to rule on the case. However, the State applied on four occasions for the Supreme Court to postpone delivering judgement and presented secret evidence to the court to argue for adjournments. The Lebanese detainees' lawyer was consistently denied access to this material on security grounds.

Lebanese hostages involved in the present case

Name	Home town	Date of Arrest	Sentence
Bilal 'Abd al-Husayn Dakrub	Tibnin	17/2/86	2½ years

'Ali Husayn 'Ammar	Mays al-Jabal	1/9/86	4 years
Ahmad Muhsen 'Ammar	Mays al-Jabal	1/9/86	3 years
Hasan Sadr al-Din Hijazi	Mays al-Jabal	1/9/86	3 years
'Abd al-Hasan Hasan Surur	'Ayta al-Sha'b	4/4/87	3 years
'Abbas Hasan Surur	'Ayta al-Sha'b	31/3/87	3 years
Yusef Ya'qub Surur	'Ayta al-Sha'b	15/4/87	3 years
Husayn Fahd Daqduq	'Ayta al-Sha'b	15/4/87	1½ years

Lebanese hostages held without charge or trial

Those abducted in Lebanon in 1987, secretly transferred to Israel in 1990: Husayn Bahij Ahmad; Husayn Ahmad Rumayti; Ahmad Muhammad Taleb; Ahmad Bahij Jallul.

Abducted in Lebanon in 1989: Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd

Abducted in Lebanon in 1994: Mustafa al-Dirani

Held after expiry of his sentence

- Taken in Lebanon in 1986, sentenced to 10 years: Muhammad 'Abd al-Hadi Yassin

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