

UA 319/99

Prisoners of conscience/Legal concern 15 December 1999

**PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY** Dr. 'Abd al-Sattar Qassem, aged 50, Professor of Political Science  
 Dr Yasser Fayeq Abu Safieh, aged 45, physician  
 Dr 'Afif Suleiman al-Judeh, aged 45, physician  
 Dr 'Abd al-Rahim Kittani, aged 47  
 Dr 'Adel Samar, aged 57, economist  
 Ahmad Qatamesh, aged 46, writer and political activist  
 Ahmad Shakr Dudin, aged 58, retired teacher  
 Adnan Odeh, director of the research unit of the  
 Palestinian Legislative Council

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The eight academics and writers named above were arrested by the Palestinian authority on 28 and 29 November, after they signed a statement criticizing the Palestinian political leadership. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and is seriously concerned that they may be tried before the State Security Court, where trials have consistently been grossly unfair.

On 27 November a statement was issued by 20 prominent Palestinians, including nine members of the Palestinian parliament, which accused the Palestinian Authority of corruption and abuse of power. Over the next two days nine of the signatories were arrested, and two others spent two days under house arrest. The eight named above remain in detention.

Ahmed Qatamesh is an activist of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a radical political party opposed to the peace process. He was released in April 1998 from five years in Israeli administrative detention. He is now held in the General Intelligence Centre in Jericho, together with Dr 'Adel Samara and Dr 'Abd al-Sattar Qassem. The three men have been allowed visits by their families and representatives of human rights organizations, but after 17 days in detention only Dr 'Abd al-Sattar Qassem has been interrogated, and only once, by the Military Attorney General for the State Security Courts, Khaled al-Qidreh.

The other five are in Nablus Central Prison. Their families have been able to visit them, but they have recently been denied visits by their lawyers. The human rights organization, LAW, was not allowed to visit them, despite having a permit to do so signed by the Military Attorney-General, Khaled al-Qidreh.

The nine members of the Palestinian parliament, the Palestinian Legislative Council, who signed the statement have benefited from parliamentary immunity. On 1 December one of them, Mu'awiya al-Masri, was beaten and shot in the leg outside his home in Nablus by masked men; three people are reported to have been arrested in connection with the attack.

Hanan El Masu, Coordinator of the Human Rights Action Program of Bir Zeit University, helped to organize an appeal calling for the release of those detained. On the night of 10 December she had a stone thrown through her window, with part of the appeal and a poorly written threat to her wrapped round it. When she opened the door she was hit by another stone, which knocked her unconscious.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic or your own language:**

- stating that Amnesty International considers these eight detainees to be prisoners of conscience;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release;

- expressing particular concern that they are being detained under the jurisdiction of the State Security Court, where trials have consistently been summary and grossly unfair.
- asking the Palestinian Authority not to imprison anyone for exercising their right to freedom of expression, guaranteed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas..."

**APPEALS TO:**

President Yasser Arafat  
Palestinian Authority  
Office of the President  
The Beach Forum  
Gaza City  
Palestinian Authority

**Telegrams: President Arafat, Palestinian Authority, Gaza**  
**Faxes: + 972 7 282 2365 (when voice answers, please request fax tone)**  
**Salutation: Dear President Arafat**

Khaled al-Qidreh  
Military Attorney General  
Attorney General  
Palestinian Authority  
Attorney General Building  
Yarmouk, Gaza, Palestinian Authority  
**Telegrams: Attorney General, Palestinian Authority, Gaza via Israel**  
**Faxes: + 972 7 2824 503**  
**Salutation: Dear Attorney General**

**COPIES TO:**

Kamal Sharafi  
Chairman of the Human Rights Committee  
Palestinian Legislative Council  
P O Box 1930 Ramallah  
Palestinian Authority  
**Fax: + 972 2 298 7719**

and to diplomatic representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 January 1999.