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Israel's report to UN Committee fails to address abuses in Occupied Territories

Amnesty International is expressing its concern this week to the UN Human Rights Committee about a wide range of human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary detention and unfair trials, committed by Israel.

On 15 and 16 July the Israeli Government will be presenting its first report -- long overdue -- to the Committee. The report describes how Israel is implementing the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Members will question the Israeli delegation and make concluding observations.

Israel's report to the Committee fails to discuss the human rights situation in the Occupied Territories -- the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, South Lebanon and the Golan Heights -- even though Israel is also bound to apply the ICCPR in these areas, as well as in Israel.

"It is unacceptable that Israel fails to address in its report to the Human Rights Committee the implementation of the Covenant in the territories which it occupies, especially given the scale and seriousness of the human rights violations perpetrated against their populations," the organization said.

Amnesty International is requesting that the Committee asks Israel to submit a supplementary report on the implementation of the Covenant in the Occupied Territories. The human rights organisation is also asking the Committee to make strong recommendations to the Israeli Government on how it can fully implement the ICCPR.

Amnesty International's concerns, expressed in a memorandum to the Committee, include:

Extrajudicial killings and unlawful killings: With flagrant disrespect for the right to life, the use of extrajudicial executions to combat "terrorism" appears official policy for the Israel Government. Additionally, each year the Israeli security forces shoot dead dozens of Palestinians, frequently using excessive force and even violating the Israeli army's own Open Fire Regulations.

Torture and ill-treatment: Secret official guidelines authorize the General Security Service (GSS) to employ torture and ill-treatment during interrogations. The GSS uses sensory deprivation methods, position abuse and violent shaking systematically. Torture is not only official policy, it is effectively legalized: Israel's Supreme Court has, until now, failed to give legal protection to detainees subjected to such methods.

In Khiam Detention Centre, a prison in South Lebanon run by the South Lebanon Army (SLA), Israel's proxy militia in the area, in cooperation with Israel, Lebanese detainees are also systematically tortured.

Arbitrary detention: Israel currently holds about 90 Palestinians in arbitrary detention without charge or trial as "administrative detainees". In addition, it holds 21 Lebanese nationals in administrative detention as hostages in return for information about Israeli soldiers missing in

action in Lebanon. In November 1997 the Israeli Supreme Court held that it was legal to hold these detainees as "bargaining chips".

The Israeli army and the SLA illegally arrest Lebanese nationals in South Lebanon, taking them either to Khiam Detention Centre or, occasionally, to Israel. About 100 Lebanese detainees, including children, are imprisoned in Khiam, which operates completely outside any legal framework. None has been charged or put on trial. Some detainees have been held in this condition since 1985.

Unfair trials: Palestinian detainees receive unfair trials in the military courts set up by Israel for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Convictions are almost invariably based exclusively on the accused's confession, usually extracted by the use of torture and ill-treatment. It appears to Amnesty International that there is a presumption of guilt rather than innocence in these courts.

Background

The UN Human Rights Committee is a body of 18 experts elected by the States Parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to monitor the way these states implement their obligations set out in the Covenant. Israel ratified the Covenant in 1991. The experts act in their personal capacity and do not represent their government. The experts regularly review written reports from states on how the Covenant has been implemented by questioning government representatives and issuing written conclusions.

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