

AI INDEX: MDE 15/26/95  
EMBARGOED UNTIL 16 AUGUST 1995

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR AN END TO TORTURE AND FOR MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS OF PAST DETAINEES

Following reports that the Legal Advisor to the Israeli government will no longer allow the shaking of detainees during interrogation, Amnesty International is calling on the Israeli government to ban the use of any torture or ill-treatment of detainees immediately.

Members of the Ministerial Committee for the General Security Service will be meeting this week to decide whether to extend the exceptional dispensation for the use of increased physical pressure during the interrogation of suspected supporters or members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. A "moderate" measure of physical and psychological pressure is permitted under the secret guidelines for interrogation used by the General Security Service.

Amnesty International believes that either the guidelines for interrogation permit the use of torture or ill-treatment of detainees, or that they are also frequently violated with impunity.

Palestinian detainees in Israel have been systematically subjected to methods of torture including hooding, shaking, beating, sleep deprivation while standing or sitting in painful positions and prolonged confinement in closet-sized cells.

In April 1995 a 30-year-old detainee, 'Abd al-Samed Harizat, fell into a coma during interrogation less than 20 hours after arrest and died three days later without regaining consciousness. Autopsy reports concluded that he died from brain haemorrhaging consistent with severe shaking.

An Amnesty International medical mission which arrived in Jerusalem on 10 August 1995 discussed the treatment of detainees with Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations and with former detainees who had suffered torture or ill-treatment. The delegation included Dr Gorm Wagner, Associate Professor of Physiology at the University of Copenhagen, and Dr Karin Helweg-Larsen, a forensic pathologist -- both members of the Danish Medical Group of Amnesty International.

Some detainees told delegates that they had been given insufficient and improper medical attention. One asthmatic detainee had been medically examined and given an inhaler. He was blindfolded, rather than hooded, in order to leave his mouth and nose uncovered, while being deprived of sleep for over two days mostly sitting tied onto a kindergarten-sized chair.

"We welcome any ban on shaking but this is not enough," Dr Gorm Wagner said. "We are convinced that other methods of pressure in use in Israeli detention centres constitute torture and we urge that these methods be banned by the Israeli Government immediately. There is no

doubt that the shaking procedure used by the General Security Service during interrogations is likely to cause brain damage."

"I asked a former detainee to shake me as he had been shaken, but stopped him after three seconds. Twelve hours later I was still feeling the after-effects."

In a recent statement Prime Minister Rabin said that 8,000 Palestinian detainees had been shaken. Hundreds of these may still be suffering from different neurological problems due to brain damage. Amnesty International believes that an independent medical evaluation of sequels of shaking detainees should be initiated.

Delegates also met the Presidents and Chairman of the Ethical Committee of the Israeli Medical Association (IMA) and the Israeli Psychiatric Association who assured them that they would investigate any case where a member of its organization was shown to have acted improperly in condoning torture by failing to report it.

The IMA has sent copies of the professional ethical codes forbidding doctors from participating in torture or humiliating treatment to all its members. The chairman of the IMA's Ethical Committee agreed to make attempts to contact doctors working with the General Security Service in order to include them in their efforts to combat torture.

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