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@AMNEH 'ABD AL-JABBAR RIMAWI - TRADE UNIONISTS ACTION 1992

Amneh Rimawi, the Deputy Chair of the General Federation of Trade Unions in the West Bank, and Head of the Labour Studies Centre in Ramallah, was arrested on 12 November 1991 and was reportedly ill-treated during interrogation. Her case was featured in Amnesty International's annual Trade Unionists Action, together with cases from seven other countries.

On 29 May 1992, the Israeli Ministry of Justice issued a Fact Sheet about the case (attached). Amnesty International responded to the Ministry of Justice following receipt of the Fact Sheet. The main points of our response are outlined below.

The Trade Unionists Action has been a feature of Amnesty International's campaigning work for a number of years. It addresses cases of workers, peasants and trade unionists who have suffered human rights violations of concern to the organization, whether or not these violations are related to trade union activities.

In featuring the case of Amneh Rimawi, Amnesty International made no suggestion that she was "persecuted for her labor activities" as stated in the Fact Sheet. The text of the action clearly indicated that she had been charged with possession of a firearm. At the time, other details of the case against her were not available; a letter sent on 13 January 1992 to then Minister of Police Roni Milo was not answered. Consequently, the action focused solely on the allegations of ill-treatment. According to the latest information, Amneh Rimawi's trial has still not been concluded.

With regard to Amneh Rimawi's treatment, Amnesty International welcomes the statement from the Ministry of Justice that even if she "is on trial for serious security offences, we hold that this could in no way justify mistreating her or neglecting her medical care". However, it remains concerned at the systematic use by Israeli authorities of interrogation practices amounting to torture or ill-treatment and at the existing secret guidelines allowing for "psychological" and "physical pressure". On several occasions Amnesty International has told the Israeli authorities that it cannot accept assurances that such permissible "pressure" does not amount to torture or ill-treatment unless it is given an opportunity to review the relevant guidelines. In this respect learning that the investigation of Amneh Rimawi's allegations found that her interrogation was conducted in "full compliance" with the existing guidelines does not allay the organization's concerns about her treatment.

Moreover, the information provided in the Fact Sheet does not fully address the allegations of ill-treatment, described to be "entirely baseless". In particular:

1. Amnesty International notes the statement that she "was handcuffed and her eyes covered for limited periods" and that "this was done for security reasons only". Amnesty International has requested to be informed of the length of these periods; whether a blindfold or a hood was used to cover her eyes; and of the "security reasons" referred to in the fact sheet.
2. Amnesty International also notes the statement that "At no time was she restrained or hooded during interrogation or when she was in her cell." Amnesty International has asked to be informed of the findings as to whether she was shackled -- including to a chair -- and hooded at all during her initial detention. Her allegations also included being shackled and hooded in a yard while held in Hebron (al-Khalil) Prison.

3. There is no reference in the Fact Sheet to the allegation that during her three-day detention in Hebron she was confined to a toilet when she was not being interrogated or kept in a yard. Amnesty International asked to be informed of the findings of the investigation on this specific point.

Amnesty International reiterates its call for the Israeli authorities to review the guidelines on interrogation to ensure that they comply with the relevant international standards. It also stresses the importance of thorough investigations of allegations of ill-treatment, the methods and full findings of which should be made public if such allegations are to be responded to adequately.

Finally, Amnesty International welcomes the Ministry of Justice's assurances that Amneh Rimawi has received adequate medical treatment while in detention.