

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Palestinian Authority: Fear for safety -- abducted journalists

Amnesty International calls for the immediate release of journalist Steve Centanni and cameraman Olaf Wiig, who were abducted by Palestinian gunmen on 14 August in the Gaza Strip.

The gunmen who abducted the two media workers must release them immediately and the Palestinian Authority (PA) must spare no efforts to secure their release and to bring to justice those responsible for this and dozens of other previous abductions.

Steve Centanni, a 60-year-old American reporter, and Olaf Wiig, a 36-year-old cameraman from New Zealand, were seized by Palestinian gunmen as they were driving near the Palestinian security services headquarters in Gaza City.

They are the latest victims of abduction by Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip and, unlike in most previous such cases, to date no group is known to have claimed responsibility for their abduction. The vast majority of foreign nationals kidnapped in the past two years were released unharmed within hours, though some were held for several days.

The fact that the two are still missing a week after their abduction and that no group is known to have acknowledged holding them raises concerns about their safety.

The organization called on the Palestinian Authority (PA) to take urgent and concrete steps to put an end to the recurring practice of abductions in the Gaza Strip and to ensure that prompt and independent investigations are carried out into this and previous abductions, with a view to bringing the culprits to justice.

Amnesty International also calls on the PA to investigate all other abductions by Palestinian gunmen in the Gaza Strip in recent weeks, and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice.

To date in virtually every single abduction -- of foreigners and Palestinian alike -- no one is known to have been brought to justice.

The impunity systematically afforded by the PA to the armed groups responsible for abductions and other crimes has undoubtedly contributed to the spread of such crimes. It is high time that the PA lived up to its responsibilities and fulfilled its obligation to put an end to such practices and to restore the rule of law in the Gaza Strip.

A change in the mindset of the PA and its security forces is needed to replace the culture of impunity with a culture of accountability.

The organization is gravely concerned at the increasing lawlessness in the Gaza Strip, with frequent abductions, killings and other abuses resulting from endemic power struggles and in-fighting between rivaling PA factions, security forces and a multitude of armed groups. As armed groups linked to the *Fatah* party of President Mahmoud Abbas, to the governing *Hamas* party of Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, and to other political factions and powerful families continue to battle each other, the PA security forces have so far proved unable or unwilling to stop and prevent abuses by armed groups and to hold them accountable for their crimes.