

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Palestinian Authority: children killed amid growing lawlessness**

The killing of three children yesterday by gunmen in the Gaza Strip was an appalling act and one that Amnesty International utterly condemns. It was the latest of a series of incidents in which inter-factional fighting between Palestinian armed groups has resulted in the killing of Palestinian civilians amid increasing lawlessness in the Gaza Strip. The three children were on their way to school on the morning of 11 December when they were shot dead and others were injured by unknown gunmen in the centre of Gaza City.

The children who died were 10-year old Ousama Ba'lousha and his two brothers, Ahmad, aged seven, and Salam, aged four. Mahmoud Habil, a driver and bodyguard accompanying them, was also killed when gunmen opened fire on the car in which he and the children were travelling to their school. The dead boys' six-year-old cousin, Lydia al-'Obaid, and a second bodyguard who were also in the car were wounded, as were two other schoolchildren who were passing by at the time of the attack.

The gunmen who carried out the attack fled the scene and have so far not been apprehended. There is speculation that the attack may have intended to target the children's father, a high-ranking official in the Palestinian Authority (PA)'s intelligence service.

Since it occurred, in the absence of information about the identity and motives of those responsible for the attack, Palestinian political factions and their armed wings have been trading blame and accusations, prompting fears that the already tense situation in the Gaza Strip, resulting from the standoff between the PA government of Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyeh and the PA President Mahmoud Abbas, may deteriorate further.

Lawlessness in the Gaza Strip has reached an unprecedented level. Armed groups linked to the Fatah party of President Mahmoud Abbas and to the Hamas party of PA Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyeh, as well as other armed groups and gangs, have engaged in armed confrontations and attacks on one another which increasingly endanger the lives of Palestinian civilians and a number of gun battles by such armed groups in the streets have resulted in civilian bystanders being killed and injured.

Although scores of Palestinian civilians, including several children, in the Gaza Strip have been killed and many others injured in armed attacks and confrontations between Palestinian armed groups, those responsible for such attacks have rarely been arrested or prosecuted. The pattern of impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of such attacks ultimately encourages further abuses and fuels the cycle of revenge killings.

Amnesty International expressed its concern about such attacks and the impunity with which they are carried out in meetings earlier this week with the PA's President and Interior, Foreign and Deputy Prime Ministers, and called for action by all sides within the PA to end the violence and bring the perpetrators to justice. The organization is calling now for a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into yesterday's attack in which children were among those killed and injured, and for all such attacks by armed groups to be impartially and independently investigated and for those responsible to be brought to justice in compliance with international standards for fair trials.