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**PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD NOT ACCEPT HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES IN THE NAME OF FIGHTING "TERRORISM"**

The human rights situation under the Palestinian Authority (PA) will remain fragile if the international community continues to accept human rights abuses in the name of fighting "terrorism", Amnesty International said today on the return of its delegates from the area.

"While there has been an improvement in the human rights situation in the PA since the end of last year, the danger of continuing abuses cannot be underestimated," the organization said.

"It is imperative that the international community does not condone or encourage the PA to allow arbitrary political arrests, prolonged detention without trial, or flagrantly unfair trials before the State Security Court under the guise of fighting "terrorism".

The Amnesty International delegates, who have just returned from their visit to the areas under the PA, were not able to meet officials of the Israeli Government in order to raise the organization's concerns including the use of torture, administrative detention, and unlawful use of lethal force. A request to visit Megiddo Prison in Israel to see a number of Palestinian administrative detainees held for years without trial was refused by the Israeli Ministry of Defence.

The delegates visited Bir Zeit University Human Rights Action Project on 29 March just two hours before a student of the university, 'Abdullah Khalil Salah, was killed apparently by live ammunition fired by Israeli soldiers during a demonstration south of Ramallah. Amnesty International expressed concern that the deaths of 'Abdullah Khalil Salah, and two other Palestinians killed on 1 April, appeared to be a result of unlawful use of lethal force and called for an investigation into these deaths.

Scores of Palestinians have been wounded by rubber bullets and some by live ammunition fired by the Israeli security forces over the past two weeks of stone-throwing demonstrations against the Israeli Government's authorization to build a Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem. Amnesty International urges the Israeli Government to respect United Nations standards which state that firearms should only be used in self-defence or defence against imminent danger.

In relation to the PA, there has been pressure, especially from Israel and the USA, for the PA to arrest "terrorists". This has been particularly the case after the recent suicide bombs including one which killed three civilians in Tel Aviv in March.

“Every authority has a right and duty to arrest perpetrators of violent crimes. This duty, however, should not be translated -- as it was last year -- into arbitrary arrest, torture and prolonged detention without charge or trial of political opponents of the peace process,” Amnesty International said.

The Amnesty International delegates did however note the recent improvements in the human rights situation in the PA. President Arafat, had according to PA officials, issued directives against “violence” and drawn up new regulations defining the precise areas of work of PA security services and forbidding anyone but the police to interrogate common law detainees. The delegates were also assured that those arrested for non-political offences had immediate access to their families.

“Despite these positive assurances, we have still not been given guarantees that the PA would allow families and lawyers prompt access after arrest to political detainees or that grossly unfair trials before the State Security Courts would end,” Amnesty International said.

Part of the changed human rights atmosphere in the PA is said to have come over the past two months from the shock at the death after torture at the hands of PA military intelligence (*istikhbarat*) of 35-year-old Yusef al-Baba on 1 February. The death was vigorously condemned by Freih Abu Middein, the PA Minister of Justice and other officials.

But in January, only one week before Yusuf al-Baba’s death, the head of the *istikhbarat* had told an Amnesty International delegation that they would never use torture as it was ‘primitive’.

“Actions speak louder than words -- it is essential that the trial of those under arrest on suspicion of involvement in the incommunicado detention and death of Yusef al-Baba be fair and open rather than a cover-up of the truth in a secret or summary trial before the State Security Courts,” Amnesty International said.

“We welcome improvements, such as the access to prisons given to the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as the clear desire of many officials of the PA to ensure respect for the rule of law. But we regard immediate access to families and lawyers for all those arrested as one of the key necessities to end secret detention and torture which has played a part in the death of 11 Palestinians over the past 30 months.”

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