

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED TERRITORIES Asam Halman (27) car mechanic

Asam Halman, a resident of Bethlehem, was detained on 25 July 1997 and is being held in the interrogation wing of the Detention Centre in Jerusalem. He has been subjected to torture during interrogation and Amnesty International fears this may continue.

The General Security Service (GSS) initially prevented a meeting between Asam Halman and his attorney, but on 28 July the attorney was notified that it would be possible to visit him. When the attorney tried to see him at 1.00pm the next day it was announced that Asam Halman was in interrogation and that the visit would be delayed. The attorney was finally given access to Asam late in the afternoon.

During his interrogation Asam Halman was reportedly forced to squat (*gambaz*) for various periods of time. He was forced to sit on a chair with his knees reaching his chin, his arms stretched backwards and his hands tied to the back of the chair so that his back was stretched to the side and back. He was hooded with a bag and loud music was played almost all the time. He was frequently not allowed to go to the toilet and was permitted to sleep only four and a half hours over a four-day period. His hands were swollen, due to an over-tightening of the handcuffs. On his right wrist he had an infected wound. He was hardly able to move his fingers.

All these methods of interrogation are in contravention of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was ratified by Israel on 2 November 1991. Torture is absolutely prohibited under international law, and this obligation cannot be derogated from under any circumstances. Article 2 (2) of the mentioned Convention says "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

On 30 July, the attorney lodged a petition with the Israeli Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice requesting the Court to explain why his client was being subjected to torture. Among the cases cited in the petition was one in which the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled against a Holiday Company stating that certain positions forced upon alligators shown to tourists constituted torture.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has for years expressed its concern that secret guidelines to the 1987 Landau report on the GSS allow the use of torture or ill-treatment. The Landau report allowed the use of "moderate physical pressure"; since October 1994 a special ministerial committee has allowed "increased physical pressure". GSS officers testifying in court admit using prolonged sleep deprivation, position abuse by holding detainees for long periods standing or sitting in painful positions while deprived of sleep, and squatting (*gambaz*) for up to two hours at a time. Violent shaking (*tiltul*), which may cause brain damage, has been recorded for years and can be authorized by the head of the GSS. However, while admitting these methods are used, the Israeli Government denies that they constitute torture. Amnesty International does not agree; nor does the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who has referred to many of these practices

as "methods of torture". In May 1997, the UN Committee against Torture stated that Israeli methods of interrogation constitute torture as defined in article 1 of the Convention against Torture.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- urging that Asam Halman be treated humanely in accordance with international standards;
- stressing that governments are under solemn obligation not to allow any form of torture under any circumstances (quoting from UN Convention against Torture);
- demanding that Asam Halman be allowed medical treatment.

APPEALS TO:

1. Mr Binyamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign affairs and Housing
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
Jerusalem 91919
State of Israel
Telegrams: Prime Minister Netanyahu, Jerusalem, Israel
Telexes: 25279 mpres il
Faxes: +972-2-566-4838
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

2. Mr Tzahi Hanegbi
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
29 Salah al-Din Street
Jerusalem 91029
State of Israel
Fax: +972-2-6285-438
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Jerusalem, Israel
Salutation: Dear Minister

3. Mr Avigdor Kahalani
Minister of Internal Security
Ministry of Internal Security
PO Box 18182
3 Sheikh Jarrah
Kiryat Hamemshala
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State of Israel
Fax: +972-2-582-6769
Telegrams: Internal Security Minister, Jerusalem, Israel
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

HaMoked, 4 Abu Obeidah Street, Jerusalem 97200, Israel

and to diplomatic representatives of Israel/Occupied Territories accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 September 1997.