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<u>PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO FREE EXPRESSION AFTER NINE-HOUR DETENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST</u>

Condemning the nine-hour detention by the Palestinian Authority of the Human Rights Commissioner of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), Amnesty International called on the Palestinian Authority to protect the right to speak freely without fear of reprisals.

"This is not the first time that a human rights activist has been arrested by the Palestinian Authority for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression," Amnesty International said. "The Palestinian Authority must protect this right."

Dr Iyad al-Sarraj, a leading human rights activist and head of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, was reportedly arrested at 1pm on 7 December on the orders of the Palestinian Authority's Attorney General, Khaled al-Qidrah. He was taken by police from the offices of the Mental Health Programme and taken to the Palestinian police headquarters in Rimal where he was held for nine hours and questioned by police in the presence of the Attorney General. He was released at about 10pm.

The PICCR was set up in September 1993 by Chairman Yasser Arafat to monitor the Palestinian Authority's laws and departments in order to ensure the requirements for the protection of human rights. The Commission was formed of a number of independent Palestinian personalities and initially headed by Dr Hanan Ashrawi; she was succeeded as President by Dr Iyad al-Sarraj in September 1995.

The arrest of Dr Iyad al-Sarraj apparently came after he had threatened to raise publicly   the Attorney General's failure to respond to complaints raised by the PICCR about deaths in custody of Palestinian detainees, misuse of public funds, and other matters.

Amnesty International is calling on the Palestinian Authority to ensure that institutions and organizations engaged in protecting human rights and in monitoring human rights violations are supported and protected.
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