

18 July 2001

AI Index MDE 15/066/2001 - News Service Nr. 124

**Israel/Occupied Territories:
The international community must act to end Israel's policy of
closures and house demolitions**

Amnesty International called today on the international community to act promptly to end the Israeli policy of closures in the West Bank and Gaza.

The confinement of more than three million people for 10 months to their own villages or homes by curfews and closures is a totally unacceptable response to the violence of a few," the organization said.

Amnesty International welcomed the European Union's call on Monday 16 July for international observers. But the international community must not wait any longer before acting to unblock what has become an intolerable situation," said the organization.

The delegates from Amnesty International, Philippe Hensmans, Director of Amnesty International's Belgian (Francophone) Section, and Elizabeth Hodgkin, researcher, returned yesterday from a fact-finding visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories and travelled widely around the area.

Almost every road to every village we passed south of Jerusalem was blocked by mountains of earth or concrete blocks. The main north-south road between Nablus, the area's largest city, and Jenin is empty of vehicles other than army vehicles for many stretches. Army checkpoints consistently turn back Palestinian vehicles. In a number of cases, Palestinians requiring urgent medical attention have died," said Philippe Hensmans.

ASuch a situation should no longer be tolerated by the international community,@ said Amnesty International. AClosures constitute the collective punishment of a whole people.@

AIn all cases the closures deny the right to freedom of movement and suffocate economic life. They are not effective in preventing violent attacks against Israelis, as the latest suicide bombings have shown,@ the organization said.

Delegates also visited areas of the West Bank where dozens of homes of Nawaje=a Bedouin groups had been bulldozed in reprisal after one settler had been killed.

AIn the vast majority of encampments, not a single person was accused of the murder and arrested. Yet the Israeli Defence Force bulldozed the tents and stone shelters, blew up the caves where many groups live, and even filled wells with rubble.@

In Rafah and Khan Yunis more than 70 homes have been demolished since March, most of them one-storey buildings of refugees who lost their homes in 1948.

Israel is a High Contracting Party to the Geneva Conventions. Yet its actions towards the Palestinians, regarded as Aprotected persons@ under the Conventions, is in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Article 33 states clearly that:

“No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited....

Reprisals against protected persons and their property are prohibited.@

In a joint letter to political and UN leaders on 6 July, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reiterated their calls for international observers to monitor compliance with human rights and international humanitarian law as a means of enhancing protection for civilians.

Background

Since the beginning of the intifada in late September 2000 at least 480 Palestinians have been killed, most of them unlawfully, by Israeli security forces when their lives and the lives of others were not in danger.

More than 130 Israelis have been killed, most of them civilians deliberately targeted in suicide bombings or drive-by shootings by Palestinian armed groups and individuals.

Human rights abuses by opposition groups can never justify abandonment of human rights principles by a government.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>