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CAT: ISRAEL CONTINUES TO DEFY THE COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

GENEVA -- As the 19th session of the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) opens, Amnesty International today called on Israel to stop immediately using interrogation methods which constituted torture.

"Israel is defying the Committee's recommendations, made at its last session in May, by its continued use of torture and ill-treatment and its failure to submit a new report to the CAT at this session," Amnesty International said.

At its last session the UN Committee against Torture found that interrogation methods employed by Israel constituted torture. These methods include restraining detainees in very painful positions, sleep deprivation for prolonged periods, hooding, prolonged subjection to loud music, threats, including death threats and violent shaking. The Committee recommended that Israel stop using them immediately. They contravene the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

"Israel appears to be disregarding all of the CAT's recommendations," Amnesty International said.

Since 1987 official sanction has been given by the Israeli Government to the General Security Service (GSS) interrogators for the use of "moderate physical pressure" during interrogation of security detainees. Secret government guidelines set down what is regarded as "moderate physical pressure", which appears to include sleep deprivation, position abuse, hooding with filthy sacks, being forced to squat like a frog for hours and violent shaking (which caused the death of one detainee in 1995).

In November 1996 the CAT took the unusual step of asking Israel to submit an additional report, following a ruling by the Israeli High Court of Justice earlier that month allowing the GSS to use physical force during the interrogation of a Palestinian security suspect. On 9 May, after considering Israel's report, the CAT stated that certain interrogation practices used by the GSS "constitute torture". The Committee recommended that Israel cease these practices immediately. However, since the CAT's decision, there have been a number of cases in which torture and ill-treatment were again used by the GSS.

One case is that of Assam Halman, aged 27, a car mechanic from Bethlehem who was detained on 25 July 1997 and held in the Moscobiyya Police Station in Jerusalem. During the first four days of his interrogation, GSS officers forced him to squat for extended periods of time and 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 prevented from going to the toilet and was permitted to sleep only four and a half hours a day over a four-day period. His lawyer reported that Assam Halman's hands were swollen, due to an over tightening of his handcuffs. On his right wrist he had an infected wound. He was hardly able to move his fingers.

Israel's current refusal to submit the report requested by the CAT in May 1996 is not the only instance of its non-cooperation with UN human rights bodies. Israel has still not submitted its first periodic report, due by 2 January 1993, to the Human Rights Committee, the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Israeli governmental officials have not held official meetings with the UN Special Rapporteur on the question of the violation of human rights in the occupied Arab Territories, including Palestine, since April 1995.

"Israel is openly defying the recommendations of the Committee against Torture," Amnesty International said. "We call on the Israeli Government to take immediate steps to comply with the Convention and to submit a report to the UN Committee against Torture as a matter of urgency."

Background

The UN Committee against Torture is a body of 10 experts elected by the States Parties to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment to monitor the way these states implement their obligations set out in the Convention. The experts act in their personal capacity and do not represent any government. At their twice-yearly meetings in Geneva the experts review written reports from states on how the Convention has been implemented by questioning government representatives and issuing written conclusions.

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