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ISRAEL/LEBANON: ISRAEL SHOULD GUARANTEE THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF LEBANESE TAKEN PRISONER IN LEBANON AND CLARIFY HIS LEGAL SITUATION

Amnesty International is calling on the Israeli authorities to guarantee the human rights of Mustafa al-Dirani, leader of a Lebanese armed group taken prisoner on Saturday, and clarify his legal situation.

Mustafa al-Dirani, leader of the "Faithful Resistance" (al-muqawamah al-mu'manah) group, was taken prisoner by Israeli forces during a raid on his home in Qasarnaba in the early hours of 21 May 1994 and taken to Israel, where he is currently being held incommunicado and interrogated.

The Israeli authorities maintain that Mustafa al-Dirani was responsible until early 1989 for the custody of Ron Arad, an Israeli aircraft navigator captured when his plane crashed in Lebanon in October 1986. They have stated that he has been taken to Israel not as a "bargaining chip" but in order to obtain information on the fate and whereabouts of Ron Arad. However, the Israeli authorities have not stated the legal basis for his detention or when and under what circumstances he would be released.

Amnesty International is asking the Israeli authorities for assurances that Mustafa al-Dirani is not being subjected to any form of torture or ill-treatment, and is calling on the Israeli authorities to clarify the legal grounds for having taken Mustafa al-Dirani prisoner in Lebanon and for detaining him in Israel.

"In the absence of such clarification, and the failure of the Israeli authorities to clarify the legal grounds for holding other Lebanese in similar circumstances, it would appear that Mustafa al-Dirani is being held as a hostage", Amnesty International said. "If this is the case, he should be released immediately and unconditionally, otherwise he should at least be allowed immediate access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and to communicate with his family".

At least 20 other Lebanese nationals taken prisoner in Lebanon between 1986 and 1989 are still held in Israel, and the legal status of their continued detention is unclear. Among them is Shaikh 'Abd al-Karim 'Ubayd, a Shi'a Muslim leader taken prisoner in Lebanon in 1989, and six other Lebanese Shi'a who were taken prisoner in Lebanon by the Lebanese Forces militia in 1987 and secretly transferred to Israel in 1990. They are held in an undisclosed detention centre. Amnesty International has been calling for their release if they are being held as hostages, otherwise at least for them to be given immediate access to the ICRC and be allowed to communicate with their families.

In 1986 Mustafa al-Dirani was a senior security officer with the Amal organization and apparently took Ron Arad with him when he broke away from Amal in 1988. Ron Arad's family received a letter and a photograph from Ron Arad in October 1987. The Israeli authorities believe that in early 1989 Ron Arad was handed over to Iranian Revolutionary Guards stationed in Lebanese territory under Syrian military control. Iran and Syria are reported to have denied holding him.

The fate of three other Israeli soldiers missing in Lebanon since 1982 has still not been clarified. Two others missing since 1986 are known to have died although their bodies have not been returned to Israel.

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Lebanese, Iranian and Syrian authorities to clarify the fate or provide any information about Ron Arad and the remaining missing Israeli soldiers. The organization believes that they should be released if they are being held as hostages, otherwise they should at least be allowed access to the ICRC and to communicate with their families.

Amnesty International opposes the taking of hostages by either governments or political armed groups. It also opposes abductions and the detention of political prisoners without a prompt and fair trial. International human rights law prohibits forms of arbitrary arrest such as abductions in foreign countries.

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