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MEDIA ADVISORY TO EDITORS

Today Amnesty International released a report entitled *Trial at Midnight: Secret, summary, unfair trials in Gaza*.

The State Security Court, which is the subject of this report, was established by the Palestinian Authority in February 1995 and became operational in April 1995.

The court has tried people accused of security offences such as transporting explosives, recruiting suicide bombers, or weapons training without a permit.

The report follows a news release issued on 27 April during a visit to Gaza in which Amnesty International condemned these trials as unfair. Since then trials have continued. As of 27 May at least 33 people had been tried by the court in trials which breached minimum, internationally-recognized standards for fair trial. Twenty-nine of the 33 were convicted, with sentences ranging up to 25 years' imprisonment.

These trials have taken place in secret, without advance notice, in the middle of the night, with security

force officers serving as judges. The defendants were not represented by a defence lawyer of their choice, they did not have time to prepare their defence and were not able to appeal to a higher court.

The Amnesty International report contains statements by representatives of the Israeli and United States governments welcoming sentences handed down in these unfair trials. It reiterates Amnesty International's call to the Palestinian Authority to halt immediately operation of the State Security Court and to provide new trials in the ordinary civilian courts.

The human rights organization also calls on the Israeli and United States governments to refrain from endorsing or encouraging trials in Gaza's State Security Court. Amnesty International urges these governments to make it clear -- when they call for perpetrators of violent attacks to be brought to justice -- that this should be done only in courts which meet international standards for fair trial.

The organization also repeats its call to the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to ensure that respect for human rights becomes an integral part of the peace process.