

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 15/27/99

EXTRA 43/99

Torture / Legal concern / Health concern

12 March

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED TERRITORIES Muna Hassan Awad Barhasin (f), nursery school manager, aged 28

Amnesty International is alarmed at reports that Muna Hassan Awad Barhasin, a Palestinian woman arrested last month at an Israeli military checkpoint in the West Bank, is being tortured and ill-treated under interrogation by Israel's General Security Service (GSS).

Muna Hassan Awad Barhasin was arrested on 15 February 1999 as she was on her way to work at a nursery school she runs in Jenin, close to her home village of 'Arabeh. She is now being held at Kishon Detention Center in Israel.

She was held incommunicado until 2 March when she was finally allowed to see her family and a lawyer. She had apparently been held in *shabeh*, a torture method where detainees are shackled, hooded, to a small chair for hours while loud disorientating music is played. This apparently continued until 28 February after which she was only allowed to sleep for four hours a day. She reported that GSS interrogators had tried to pressure her to confess to actions she had not committed and had threatened to put her in administrative detention (where detainees are held without charge or trial for a renewable period of up to 6 months on the orders of a military commander).

Muna Hassan Awad Barhasin has reportedly been on hunger strike since 16 February but is drinking water.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

For years, Amnesty International has expressed concern that secret Israeli guidelines (authorized by the so-called Landau report in 1987), allow for the use of torture or ill-treatment, which it refers to as "moderate physical pressure". Similarly, since October 1994 a special ministerial committee has said that "increased physical pressure" can be used during interrogation.

GSS officers who have testified in court admit to using prolonged sleep deprivation, forcing detainees to sit or stand in painful positions for long periods of time and squatting (*gambaz*) for up to two hours at a time. Violent shaking (*tiltul*), which may cause brain damage, has also been used but must be authorized by the head of the GSS.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and the UN Committee against Torture have referred to many of these practices as "methods of torture" as defined in the UN Convention against Torture. The Israeli government, however, denies they constitute torture.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Hebrew or English or your own language:

- asking the Israeli authorities whether *shabeh* has been used on Muna Hassan Awad Barhasin at Kishon Detention Center and reminding them that this practice constitutes torture, in breach of the Convention against Torture to which Israel is a State Party;
- asking that the use of any interrogation methods which constitute torture or ill-treatment cease immediately;

- calling for the release of Muna Hassan Awad Barhasin if she is not to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a fair trial according to international standards;
- reminding the government of Israel of its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Article 5: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

APPEALS TO:

Mr Binyamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
Jerusalem 91919, Israel
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Jerusalem, Israel
Telexes: 25279 mpres il
Faxes: + 972 2 566 4838
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mr Tzahi Hanegbi
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
29 Salah al-Din Street
Jerusalem 91029, Israel
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Jerusalem, Israel
Faxes: + 972 2 628 5438
Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Ami Ayalon
Head of the General Security Service
C/o the Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
Jerusalem 91919, Israel
Telegrams: Ayalon, Head GSS, Prime Minister's Office, Jerusalem, Israel
Telexes: 25279 mpres il
Faxes: + 972 2 566 4838
Salutation: Dear Mr Ayalon

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 April 1999.