

EXTERNAL

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Fear of torture / Legal concern

7 August 1997

**ISRAEL/OCCUPIED TERRITORIES At least 188 detained since recent suicide bombings
in Israel**

In a wave of arrests following suicide bombings in Jerusalem on 30 July 1997, at least 188 suspected supporters of *Hamas* and other Islamist groups have been detained by the Israeli authorities. Amnesty International fears that those arrested may face torture or ill-treatment during interrogation. Fifteen people, including the two suicide bombers, were killed and more than 150 wounded in the attack on 30 July.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has frequently reported on systematic torture or ill-treatment of detainees suspected of Islamist sympathies by the General Security Service (GSS). The GSS has stated that the use of physical and psychological pressure on detainees may help them to locate other bombs aimed at killing civilians. As a result, on previous occasions hundreds of Palestinians have been arrested and tortured or ill-treated.

The methods of interrogation used by the GSS are in contravention of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which was ratified by Israel on 2 November 1991. Torture is absolutely prohibited under international law, and this obligation cannot be derogated from under any circumstances. Article 2 (2) of the mentioned Convention says "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

Amnesty International has for years expressed its concern that secret guidelines to the 1987 Landau report on the GSS allow the use of torture or ill-treatment. The Landau report allowed the use of "moderate physical pressure"; since October 1994 a special ministerial committee has allowed "increased physical pressure". GSS officers testifying in court admit using prolonged sleep deprivation, position abuse by holding detainees for long periods standing or sitting in painful positions while deprived of sleep, and squatting (*gambaz*) for up to two hours at a time. Violent shaking (*tiltul*), which may cause brain damage, has been recorded for years and can be authorized by the head of the GSS. However, while admitting these methods are used, the Israeli Government denies that they constitute torture. Amnesty International does not agree; nor does the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who has referred to many of these practices as "methods of torture". In May 1997, the UN Committee against Torture stated that Israeli methods of interrogation constitute torture as defined in article 1 of the Convention against Torture.

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

- while recognizing the revulsion caused by the deliberate and arbitrary killing of civilians, emphasising that no level of abuse by armed opposition groups can be an excuse for committing human rights violations;
- demanding that those detained be brought to trial on recognizable criminal charges or else released;
- calling on the Israeli authorities to ensure that, in accordance with the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment

or Punishment, ratified by Israel in 1991, no one suffer physical or psychological torture or ill-treatment while in detention.

APPEALS TO:

1. Mr Binyamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign affairs and Housing
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
Jerusalem 91919
State of Israel

Telegrams: Prime Minister, Jerusalem, Israel

Telexes: 25279 mpres il

Faxes: +972-2-566-4838

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

2. Mr Tzahi Hanegbi
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
29 Salah al-Din Street
Jerusalem 91029
State of Israel

Fax: +972-2-6285-438

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Jerusalem, Israel

Salutation: Dear Minister

3. Mr Avigdor Kahalani
Minister of Internal Security
Ministry of Internal Security
PO Box 18182
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Telegrams: Internal Security Minister, Jerusalem, Israel

Salutation: Dear Minister

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 20 September 1997.