

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 15/067/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 227  
24 November 2007

**Embargo Date: 24 November 2007 00:01 GMT**

### **Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories: Annapolis talks must lead to immediate, concrete action on human rights**

If next week's Annapolis talks are to make progress towards a just and durable solution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, peace pledges must be accompanied by clear and concrete steps to halt and redress the grave human rights abuses and serious violations of international humanitarian law that continue to destroy lives on both sides.

In particular, measurable benchmarks should be laid down by the parties to the talks -- together with a clearly-defined mechanism for their implementation and including a regime of enforceable measures -- to ensure that the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (PA) comply with their obligations under international law and that the fundamental rights of both Palestinians and Israelis are respected.

To this end, and to avoid a repetition of past failures, the parties should agree to the deployment of international human rights monitors in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), with a mandate to monitor and report publicly on compliance and on violations by either party of their commitments under international human rights and humanitarian law.

The members of the Quartet (the USA, EU, UN and Russia) and the Middle Eastern countries involved in the negotiations have an obligation, as state parties to the Geneva Conventions and to other international human rights treaties, to ensure respect for international law. They should use these prerogatives as a positive force for change and insist that both the Israeli government and the PA adhere to their human rights and international humanitarian law commitments.

Among the most pressing issues to be addressed are those that impact daily on the human rights of millions of Palestinians and Israelis, feeding the spiral of violence and impeding progress on other fronts. These must be addressed as a priority if progress is to be made towards establishing the basis for achieving a durable solution to the decades-long crisis. In particular:

- o Both Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups must immediately end unlawful killings and all other attacks on civilians and the Israeli government and the PA must both bring to justice all perpetrators of such abuses -- regardless of their rank and seniority and political affiliation or backing.
- o The Israeli government should lift without delay the current regime of blockades and restrictions on the movement of people and goods in the OPT which have effectively paralyzed the Palestinian economy and denied any semblance of normal life to the 3.5 million Palestinian inhabitants.
- o The Israeli government also should lift immediately the blockade it has imposed on the Gaza Strip and which has fuelled a humanitarian crisis, causing extreme and widespread poverty and food aid dependency, and the deaths of individuals in need of medical care unavailable in the Gaza Strip.
- o The Israeli authorities should cease all construction or expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure in the OPT, including East Jerusalem -- including the 80 percent of the 700km fence/wall built inside the occupied West Bank -- and begin preparations to relocate Israeli settlers from the OPT back to Israel. If a fence/wall is needed to protect Israelis' security, it should be positioned on the boundary between Israel and the OPT, not inside the OPT.
- o The Israeli authorities should stop destroying Palestinian homes and land in the OPT, cancel outstanding demolition orders, and transfer the responsibility for planning and building regulations in the OPT from the Israeli

- army to the local Palestinian communities.
- o The Israeli authorities should release Palestinians arbitrarily detained, notably more than 800 administrative detainees who are held without charge or trial, and should review the cases of some 300 Palestinian children, who have been trial or are awaiting trial by Israeli military courts without benefiting from the necessary procedures designed to protect children, in breach of the provisions stipulated by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### ***Killings of civilians***

Unarmed civilians have paid a heavy price for the repeated failures of the opposing parties, and of the international community, to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the collapse of the Oslo process and the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising (*intifada*), seven years ago, some 4,300 Palestinians, including some 850 children, have been killed by Israeli forces and some 1,100 Israelis, including 120 children have been killed by Palestinian armed groups. Tens of thousands of others have been injured, many of them maimed for life. Most of the victims on both sides have been unarmed civilians not involved in the conflict who were killed unlawfully.

Since the 2003 "Roadmap" -- the last internationally-backed but never implemented agreement between Israel and the PA -- more than 2,200 Palestinians and more than 300 Israelis have lost their lives.

While recent years have seen a welcome and significant decrease in the number of Israeli victims, the killings of Palestinians by Israeli forces has continued at a high level. This year alone, close to 300 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces, scores of them children, and 11 Israelis have been killed by Palestinian armed groups. The perpetrators, on both sides, have been able to act with impunity; neither the Israel government nor the PA has shown any serious inclination to hold those who perpetrate abuses to account, further fuelling the violence.

### ***Settlements and "outposts"***

The Quartet powers must require the Israeli government to end its unlawful appropriation of Palestinian land and natural resources in the OPT on alleged grounds of "security" and to expand unlawful Israeli settlements. Under the "Roadmap" agreement, the Israeli government undertook to freeze all settlement activity, including expansion for so-called "natural growth," and to dismantle all the settlement "outposts" established since 2001, but it has signally failed to do so. Instead, dozens of these "outposts" -- as well as some 150 settlements officially recognized by the Israeli government throughout the West Bank -- have been expanded. While the removal of some 8,000 Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005 was a positive step, it was offset by a larger increase in the number of Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank.

### ***Checkpoints and blockades***

The Israeli government has failed to fulfil its commitment made last month to the US administration in preparation of the Annapolis meeting to remove some of the 560 military checkpoints and blockades which impede the movement of Palestinians between towns and villages in the West Bank, and to allow access for Palestinian farmers now cut off from their land by special procedures or processes designed to protect children the construction of the fence/wall. The Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) of the UN reported last week that the Israeli army had lifted only two of 24 blockades that were supposed to be removed, and that only 18 percent of the 30,000 Palestinians who have been cut off from their land by the fence/wall have been able to obtain permits from the Israeli army to access their land.

### ***Gaza***

At the same time, the tightening by Israel of the blockade on the Gaza Strip continues to have devastating consequences for its 1.5 million inhabitants. With only rare exceptions, critically ill patients continue to be prevented from leaving Gaza, where the medical treatment they need is not available, and several have died as a result. The World Health Organization reported earlier this month a shortage of some essential drugs and a further deterioration in health among the inhabitants of Gaza, where hospitals are also affected by food shortages, including dairy products and meat. International aid agencies have expressed concern that Israeli restrictions on the movement of goods into the Gaza Strip are severely hampering their ability to meet the humanitarian needs of the population -- 80 percent of whom are now forced to rely on international assistance.

The international community must continue to insist that the PA, and the Hamas de-facto administration in Gaza, take immediate steps to put an end to the firing of home-made "Qassam" into Israel by Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip.

The international community must also demand the immediate lifting of the arbitrary and disproportionate blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza, which constitutes a form of collective punishment on the Palestinian inhabitants, including hundreds of thousands of children and others who bear no responsibility for the violence and who are living in a dire situation of enforced poverty.

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>