

69/97

AI INDEX: MDE/15/21/97

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00 01H GMT 30 APRIL 1997

Israel/Occupied Territories: The Despair of Administrative Detainees

The Israeli authorities should put an immediate stop to administrative detention in Israel and the Occupied Territories, as their continuous misuse of this practice is in clear violation of fundamental human rights, Amnesty International said in a report issued today.

Thousands of people have been detained – sometimes for years – under administrative detention orders in Israel and the Occupied Territories, without trial and without being given details of the charges against them. Detention orders of up to six months are frequently renewed without a judicial hearing, a process which can continue indefinitely.

“I have spent two and a half of my twenty-one years in prison. Was I created to spend the flower of my youth behind bars? Will my family continue to be forced to receive the same reply every six months: ‘Your son’s detention has been renewed?’” (extract from a letter written by Mahmud Dhib al-Adariya, a Palestinian administrative detainee in Israel).

In its 20-page report issued today, Amnesty International documents the pattern of misuse of administrative detention in Israel and the Occupied Territories, the broad formulation of the grounds of detention, the allegations of torture or ill-treatment during interrogation, and the fact that some of these detainees are prisoners of conscience, held solely for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association.

Imad Sabi was the Executive Director of Programs at a Palestinian non-governmental organization working on issues of community and social development. He has been under administrative detention since 1995. In a letter he described his daily life as an administrative detainee: “I am burdened with confusion in the face of the myriads of wrongs, violations of human dignity, and abuses of human rights which take place every day. I am shocked, angered, shaken, enraged and saddened by them.” Amnesty International believes that Imad Sabi is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately.

“All political prisoners, including those held in administrative detention, should be charged with a recognizable criminal offence and given a fair and prompt trial in accordance with international standards, or be released,” Amnesty International said. “Those held solely for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association should be released immediately.”

At the beginning of this year at least 270 detainees were being held under administrative detention orders, mostly lodged in tents, exposed to extreme heat and cold, in Megiddo Prison in Israel. The vast majority of them are Palestinians. However, five Jewish men were also detained in 1996; they have all since been released.

The Israeli authorities justify using administrative detention, which is permitted under Israeli law, by saying that the detainees are "terrorists". Amnesty International in no way disputes a government's right and duty to bring perpetrators of crime to justice, but the organization believes that administrative detention cannot be considered justice.

In its report, the human rights organization documents several poignant cases, illustrating what life is like for the families of administrative detainees. Majd, the 10-year old daughter of Khaled Dalaysah, wrote: "When I was five, my daddy was put in administrative detention. They said to me then that it was only for six months. I did not know that these six months would be extended ... every six months my sisters and I put on our best clothes and wait ... and wait."

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