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PUBLIC STATEMENT

Israel should observe UN Committee against Torture call for immediate halt to torture

Amnesty International today welcomed yesterday's conclusions by the United Nations Committee against Torture which reiterated its call to Israel to cease immediately the use of torture and ill-treatment during interrogation. The appeal came as the Committee gave its conclusions on Israel's second periodic report.

The Committee found that Israel, on its own admission, used "hooding, shackling in painful positions, sleep-deprivation and shaking" against detainees. The Committee reiterated that all these methods constituted torture, banned by Article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Convention).

The Committee also expressed concern about the holding of detainees in administrative detention, without charge or trial, for long periods, particularly where the detainees themselves posed no threat to state security. This was an apparent reference to the November 1997 decision of the Israeli Supreme Court endorsing the holding of 10 Lebanese detainees as "bargaining chips". The Committee recommended that Israel review the practice of administrative detention to ensure that it does not amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Committee also noted Israel's "apparent failure" to implement any of its previous recommendations made in 1994 and 1997, and reaffirmed their recommendation.

The Committee asked the Israeli Government to incorporate the convention's provisions into Israeli law. Amnesty International is calling for a review of the draft Law on the General Security Service, currently before the Knesset. The bill includes provisions which violate the convention. For example, the draft law grants GSS employees immunity from criminal liability if they are "acting in good faith and in a reasonable manner". If interrogation rules continue to sanction torture and ill-treatment, as they do now, GSS agents will still be able to use such methods with impunity, in violation of Article 4 of the Convention.

Tomorrow, the Israeli Supreme Court will hold its second session reviewing the legality of official rules which apparently authorize the General Security Service (GSS) to use interrogation methods such as violent shaking; sleep deprivation for prolonged periods; shackling in painful positions; hooding; and forcing of detainees to listen to loud noise for prolonged periods.

Amnesty International urges the Supreme Court to take note of the Committee's recommendations and declare illegal all GSS interrogation methods which violate the Convention's prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, methods condemned by the Committee as torture.

ENDS.../