

EXTERNAL

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Prisoner of conscience

20 May 1996

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY Dr Iyad al-Sarraj, human rights defender

Dr Iyad al-Sarraj, a prominent human rights defender, is in detention after being questioned about a recent interview he gave to the *New York Times* on 6 May 1996 in which he described human rights violations under the Palestinian Authority (PA), including arbitrary arrests and torture. Amnesty International believes that he is a prisoner of conscience.

Dr Iyad al-Sarraj, who is Director of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program and Human Rights Commissioner General of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights (PICCR), was summoned from his home in Gaza on 18 May 1996. Three members of the criminal investigation department of the PA security forces, who were reportedly dressed as civilians and initially claimed to be patients, told him to go for questioning. He contacted the head of the criminal investigation department who is said to have informed him that he would only be needed for a simple matter. Dr Iyad al-Sarraj was not informed of any charges against him.

Dr Iyad al-Sarraj is currently detained on the orders of the Attorney General Khaled al-Qidreh. He is being held in the offices of the criminal investigation department. The PICCR sent a lawyer to meet Dr Iyad al-Sarraj immediately after he was detained. The lawyer was reportedly allowed to meet him for only five minutes. On 20 May he was able to meet another lawyer from a Palestinian human rights organization, Raji Sourani.

Khaled al-Qidreh is reported to have said that Dr Iyad al-Sarraj was under investigation for slandering the PA and would be detained for 48 hours after which the period of detention could be renewed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Dr Iyad al-Sarraj was previously detained for nine hours on 7 December 1995 and questioned about criticisms he had made about the PA's human rights record. He was questioned by the police in the presence of the Attorney General. Amnesty International issued a news service (243/95) condemning the detention.

The PICCR was set up in September 1993 by Chairman Arafat to monitor the PA's laws and departments in order to ensure the requirements for the protection of human rights. The Commission was formed of a number of independent Palestinians and initially headed by Dr Hanan Ashrawi; she was succeeded by Dr Iyad al-Sarraj.

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

- stating that Amnesty International considers Dr Iyad al-Sarraj to be a prisoner of conscience;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release;
- reminding the Palestinian Authority that Chairman Yasser Arafat stated to an Amnesty International delegation that he was committed to respect all internationally recognised human rights standards;
- calling on the Palestinian Authority to ensure that institutions and organizations engaged in protecting human rights and in monitoring human rights violations are supported and protected.

APPEALS TO:

Chairman Yasser Arafat
Head of the Palestinian Authority
Palestinian Authority
Al-Muntada,
Gaza,
Palestinian Authority
Telegrams: Chairman Arafat, Gaza, via Israel
Faxes: +972 7 823 744
Salutation: Dear Mr. Arafat

Khaled al-Qidreh
Attorney General
Palestinian Authority
Attorney General Building
Yarmouk,
Gaza,
Palestinian Authority
Telegrams: Attorney General, Palestinian Authority, Gaza via Israel
Faxes: +972 7 824 503
Salutation: Dear Attorney General

COPIES TO:

Chairman Yasser Arafat is on a visit to Greece until 22 May 1996

Palestinian Liberation Organization representative in Greece
Faxes: +301 672 6064

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights
Ritz Hotel
Jerusalem
via Israel
Faxes: +972 2 282 869

and to diplomatic representatives of the Palestinian Authority accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 20 June 1996.