

UA 165/98 Fear of Torture or ill-treatment / Legal Concern /
Arbitrary arrests

29 May 1998

ISRAEL/SOUTH LEBANON Around 60 Lebanese nationals arrested in South Lebanon

Around 60 Lebanese nationals have been arrested by the South Lebanese Army (SLA) in Israeli-occupied South Lebanon following a roadside bomb explosion near the village of Markaba on 27 May 1998. They are now said to be under interrogation by the SLA and Israel's General Security Service (GSS), both of which practice torture on a routine basis. There are grave fears that those arrested are in danger of being tortured, ill-treated or detained for prolonged periods without trial.

While some of those arrested in the raids may be released after a few days others may be taken to Israel where they could be held incommunicado for up to three months, without access to lawyers, or to the notorious Khiam Detention Centre in South Lebanon where torture appears to be routine.

The bomb, which was placed only 50 metres from Lebanon's border with Israel, killed two members of an Israeli army patrol and wounded the others. Responsibility has been claimed by *Hizbullah* which is carrying out armed opposition to the Israeli occupation of part of South Lebanon. General Efi Fein, who commands the Israeli army division deployed along the Israeli-Lebanese frontier was quoted as saying that the attack "suggests that the terrorists benefited from the complicity of nearby villages. We will not allow villages in south Lebanon to serve as bases for anti-Israeli operations". The Lebanese nationals arrested are from the local villages of Markaba and Houle

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture is systematically practised by both the SLA and the GSS and in Israel torture against those suspected of "hostile terrorist activity" is effectively legalised. Although the methods routinely used by the GSS against Palestinians, such as prolonged sleep deprivation in painful positions, prolonged squatting like a frog and violent shaking, have been frequently condemned as torture by the UN Committee Against Torture, their use has continued and even been upheld by judgments of the Israeli Supreme Court.

Methods of torture against captured Lebanese nationals appear to be even more severe. A Lebanese national, Ali Banjak, kidnapped in Lebanon in 1996 and acquitted by the Lod Military Tribunal in Israel in April 1998 of membership of *Hizbullah*, described being beaten all over his body, including his testicles, with clubs and hands; raised and dropped several times onto a vertical stick, causing terrible pain to his genitals; interrogated while bound on a 10-centimetre-high chair looking into a bright light, semi-starved and threatened with the death of his family or being branded as a collaborator.

Those tortured by the SLA have described being beaten or whipped while doused with hot or cold water and electric shocks.

There are presently thought to be around 150 detainees at Khiam Detention Centre, including minors, many of whom have been held for up to 12 years without charge or trial. Since September 1997 detainees have not been allowed visits either from their families or from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

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

- seeking assurances that those arrested will not be subjected to any form of torture or ill-treatment;
- calling for all those arrested, as well as the inmates of Khiam Detention Centre, to be given immediate and regular access to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and families, in accordance with standards of international human rights and humanitarian law.
- calling for the immediate release of those arrested if they are not promptly charged with criminal offences and tried according to international standards for a fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

Binyamin Netanyahu
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
Hakirya, Jerusalem 91007, Israel
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Jerusalem, Israel
Faxes: + 972 3 691 7915
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

General Yitzhak Mordechai
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
7 'A' Street, Hakirya, Tel Aviv, Israel
Telegrams: Defence Minister, Tel Aviv, Israel
Faxes: + 972 3 697 6218
Salutation: Dear Minister

General Antoine Lahad
South Lebanon Army
c/o Lieutenant-General Amnon Shahak
Chief of General Staff
7 'A' Street
Hakirya, Tel Aviv, Israel
Telegrams: General Lahad, c/o Chief General Staff, Tel Aviv, Israel
Faxes: + 972 3 691 6940 (write c/o Lieutenant-General Amnon Shakak, Chief of General Staff)
Salutation: Dear General

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 10 July 1998.