

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 15/56/96

UA 203/96

Prisoner of conscience / Legal concern

15 August 1996

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY Muhammad Dahman, 42, human rights activist

Muhammad Dahman, Director of the Gaza Office of the human rights organization *al-Damir* (Conscience), was arrested at 11.30pm on 12 August 1996 by the Palestinian Intelligence Service (*mukhaberat*) after issuing a communique calling for an investigation into the alleged suicide after interrogation of Nahid Dahlan (see below).

Muhammad Dahman has been charged with incitement by spreading false information and his case has been transferred to the State Security Court where grossly unfair summary trials have been the norm. Amnesty International considers Muhammad Dahman to be a prisoner of conscience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Muhammad Dahman, married with five children, set up *al-Damir* as a Palestinian prisoner support organization in 1992 after spending a total of 20 years in Israeli prisons. *Al-Damir* has worked on behalf of Palestinian prisoners in Israel and has also worked on detainees in the Palestinian Authority.

On 12 August 1996 *al-Damir* issued a public statement calling for an investigation into the death on 7 August of 24-year-old Nahid Dahlan, who according to the communique, had been called in for interrogation by the *mukhaberat* every evening during the previous week, returning home in the morning. The statement called for "the Palestinian National Authority to investigate and provide information about the killers of Dahlan". It is apparently this phrase which has provided the excuse for Muhammad Dahman's arrest. The PA Attorney General, Khaled al-Qidreh, is said to have stated that an autopsy found that Nahid Dahlan committed suicide from taking insecticide and that no marks of torture were found on his body.

Muhammad Dahman was arrested at 11.30pm on 12 August from his home. Reportedly three cars containing members of the *mukhaberat* came to the building where he lived; in answer to his request for an arrest warrant they stated that they had a warrant but did not show it. He was detained first in a detention centre in Shatti and then transferred to Gaza Central Prison (*al-Saraya*) where his detention was extended for 48 hours. The case was then transferred to the State Security Court. This court has held grossly unfair trials - defendants are frequently tried in summary trials, held at night; defendants have been represented by court-appointed lawyers, even when they have lawyers and there is no appeal.

The arrest of Muhammad Dahman appears to be another example of attempts by the PA to put pressure on human rights activists who openly criticize the Palestinian Authority. The then Director of the Gaza Centre for Rights and Law, Raji Sourani, was detained for 16 hours in February 1995 after criticizing the decree setting up the State Security Courts. Bassem Eid, a fieldworker for the human rights organization B'Tselem, was detained for 24 hours in January 1996 (see Further information on UA 214/95, MDE 15/02/96, 3 January 1996). Dr Iyad Sarraj, the President of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights, was detained three times in December 1995 and in May and June 1996 after criticizing the PA (see EXTRA 70/96, MDE 15/34/96, 20 May 1996 and updates).

At least seven people have died in custody in the Palestinian Authority since July 1994 apparently as a result of torture. Mahmud Jumayel died on 31 July 1996. No results of any investigation into any death has ever been made public.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Muhammad Dahman as a prisoner of conscience;
- expressing concern that the PA has arrested a human rights activist raising concerns about the death of Nahid Dahlan after interrogation rather than investigating the death itself;
- stating that the State Security Court does not provide the guarantees for a fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

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

Minister of Justice Mr Freih Abu Meddein
Ministry of Justice
Abu Khadra Building
Omar al-Mukhtar Street
Gaza, Palestinian Authority
Faxes: +972 7 822 236
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Palestinian Authority, Gaza, via Israel
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights
P.O. Box 54627
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 30 September 1996.