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ISRAEL: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DEPLORES DECISION TO USE "HEIGHTENED PHYSICAL PRESSURE" ON MEMBER OF ISLAMIC JIHAD

Amnesty International deplores the Israeli Supreme Court's decision yesterday authorizing the General Security Service, GSS, (*shin bet* or *shabak*) to use "increased physical pressure" on a suspected member of Islamic *Jihad*, accused of having information on suicide bomb attacks against Israel.

"Israel is a state party to United Nations (UN) treaties which outlaw torture under all circumstances. This shocking decision negates Israel's solemn obligations," Amnesty International said today.

The present judgment relates to Muhammad 'Abd al-'Aziz Hamdan, a student of Birzeit University and a suspected member of Islamic *Jihad*, who was arrested on 7 October. He was subjected to violent shaking, as well as prolonged sleep deprivation while being forced to sit or stand in painful positions.

On 12 November his lawyer, André Rosenthal, took out an injunction against the GSS and on 13 November a court order was issued forbidding the GSS to use "physical pressure" against Muhammad Hamdan. The GSS appealed and the injunction was overturned allowing the use of "increased physical pressure".

Amnesty International has for years expressed its concern that secret guidelines to the 1987 Landau report on the GSS effectively allow the use of torture. The Landau report allowed the use of "moderate physical pressure", and since October 1994 a special ministerial committee has allowed "increased physical pressure".

GSS officers testifying in court admit using prolonged sleep deprivation and forcing detainees to stand, sit or squat (*gambaz*) in painful positions for long periods of time while deprived of sleep while being interrogated. Violent shaking (*tiltul*), which may cause serious brain damage, has already caused the death of one detainee. The use of violent shaking has been recorded for years and can be authorized by the head of the GSS.

While admitting these methods are used, the Israeli Government denies they constitute torture. Amnesty International does not agree.

Amnesty International is concerned that Israel tortures and ill-treats hundreds of people every year. The violent shaking of detainees has been frequently reported over the past year, but few such cases ever come to court.

Israel states that "increased physical pressure" is necessary in "a ticking bomb situation" (when someone may have information about a bomb placed in a building full of people).

“The former Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, stated that ‘8,000 people have been shaken and only one died’ but have 8,000 people got information about ticking bombs?” Amnesty International said.

“Israel has effectively legalized torture in the face of the system which has actively sought to protect human rights under the UN for the past 50 years. We are calling on our members -- particularly those of the legal and medical profession -- throughout the world to protest against this.”

International human rights standards ratified by Israel totally forbid torture even “in time of public emergency which threatens the life of a nation”. In February 1996 an Amnesty International delegation led by its Secretary General, Pierre Sané, raised Amnesty International’s concerns about the effective legalization of torture with the previous Israeli Government; during their visit a bill offering virtual impunity for the GSS was withdrawn for further consideration.

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