

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 21/008/2007

01 June 2007

Further Information on UA 81/07 (MDE 21/005/2007, 05 April 2007) and follow-up (MDE 21/007/2007, 09 May 2007) – Fear for Safety

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Alan Johnston (m), British national, journalist

On 1 June, a Gaza-based Palestinian armed group calling itself "Army of Islam" released a video showing BBC news reporter Alan Johnston, who has been missing since his abduction in Gaza City on 12 March. This has increased fears for Alan Johnston's safety.

At the end of the video, which is not dated, Alan Johnston's captors demand the release of Abu Qatada al-Falastini, a Jordanian Muslim preacher of Palestinian origin who is currently detained in the UK on terrorism charges, and other unnamed prisoners also held in the UK. This implies that Alan Johnston's fate depends on the release of these prisoners. The video can be seen on the BBC website:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6711047.stm

Hostage taking is a grave violation of international law and can never be justified. Amnesty International urges the abductors of Alan Johnston to release him immediately.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Abductions and other acts of lawlessness perpetrated by Palestinian armed groups and gangs, especially in the Gaza Strip, stem from the failure of the government of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to ensure the rule of law and address impunity. More than 200 Palestinians, including many unarmed civilians, have been killed during the past three months in the Gaza Strip; many of them in clashes between Palestinian armed groups and rival PA security forces affiliated with PA President Abbas's Fatah party or with Prime Minister Haniyeh's Hamas party. The armed clashes which have been raging between the two sides since Hamas's election victory early last year has diminished in recent weeks, since the formation of a unity government, but attacks and abductions continue. For now those responsible continue to enjoy impunity, as the PA judicial system is in disarray and virtually paralyzed, and serious doubts remain about whether the PA is willing and able to take the necessary steps to end this lawlessness.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or English or your own language:

- expressing renewed concern for the safety of Alan Johnston following the release of a video, purportedly by the "Army of Islam" armed group, on 1 June;
- calling on the authorities to give details of their efforts to ensure the safe and immediate release of Alan Johnston;
- urging the authorities to take concrete measures to restore the rule of law in the Gaza Strip and in other areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) which fall under their jurisdiction, notably to put an end to the impunity enjoyed by armed groups, which ultimately encourages further abuses;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that all attacks against journalists and other civilians are investigated thoroughly, and that those responsible are brought to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty.

APPEALS TO:

Mahmoud Abbas
President
Office of the President
Ramallah
Palestinian Authority

Fax: +970 2 296 3170

Salutation: Dear President

Isma'il Abd al Salam Ahmad Haniyeh
Prime Minister
Gaza office:
Prime Minister's Office
Jerusalem Street
Tal al-Hawa
Gaza

Palestinian Authority

Fax: +970 8 282 2159

Email: diwan@pmo.gov.ps

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO:

Palestinian Journalists' Union
P.O.Box 219
Ramallah
Palestinian Authority

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 13 July 2007.