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PUBLIC STATEMENT

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Detention of critics of Palestinian leadership -- a severe blow to freedom of expression

The arrest and continuing detention of eight Palestinians who signed a public statement critical of the Palestinian Authority, is a severe blow to freedom of expression, Amnesty International said today.

The human rights organization considers all those detained as prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

The statement, issued on 27 November 1999 and signed by 20 prominent Palestinians, including members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, criticized the Palestinian political leadership. On 28 and 29 November nine of the signatories were arrested by branches of the Palestinian security services and two others were placed under house arrest for two days. Eight remain in detention.

On 30 November Dr 'Adel Samara, Ahmad Qatamesh and Dr 'Abd al-Sattar Qassem were transferred to a General Intelligence detention centre in Jericho. The following day Khaled al-Qidreh, the public prosecutor for the State Security Court, ordered their detention for 15 days for investigation.

Families, lawyers and human rights organizations have been able to visit the detainees, some of whom stated that they had not even been interrogated.

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at the continuing detention of signatories of the statement and at the threat that they may be facing trial before the State Security Court where trials have consistently been grossly unfair.

On 1 December the Palestinian Legislative Council condemned the statement but called for the release of the detainees.

Nine other Palestinians, who signed the statement, have benefitted from parliamentary immunity as members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. On 1 December one of the deputies who signed the statement, Mu'awiya al-Masri, was beaten and shot in the leg outside his home in Nablus by masked men; three people are reported to have been arrested in connection with the attack.

On 29 November Amnesty International wrote to President Arafat raising its concerns regarding these arrests.

BACKGROUND OF THOSE ARRESTED

Those arrested on 28 and 29 November were:

Dr ‘Abd al-Sattar Qassem, aged 50, Professor of Political Science at al-Najah University in Nablus, arrested at 2.30am and his computer, files and documents were confiscated.

Dr Yasser Fayege Abu Safieh, aged 45, arrested at 10.30am from his clinic in Nablus;

Dr ‘Afif Suleiman al-Judeh, aged 45, arrested at his home in Nablus in the evening;

Dr ‘Abd al-Rahim Kittani, aged 47, arrested at 11.45pm from his home in Tulkarem;

Dr ‘Adel Samara, aged 57, an economist, arrested at about 2pm in Ramallah/al-Bireh;

Ahmad Qatamesh, a writer, administratively detained for more than five years by Israel until his release in April 1998, was arrested when he reported to the police station in al-Bireh on 28 November after members of the Criminal Investigation Department (*mabaheth jina’iya*) had failed to find him at his house;

Ahmad Shahr Dudin, aged 58, a retired teacher, and **Adnan Odeh**, director of the research unit at the Palestinian Legislative Council, were arrested on 29 November; and

Dr Ismat Shakhshir, a chemistry lecturer at al-Najah University was interrogated for two hours on 28 November and released on bail of 50,000 shekels (\$11,850); she was rearrested when she reported to Nablus Police Station on the morning of 29 November, but later apparently released.

Two other signatories of the statement, **Bassam Shaka’a**, a former mayor of Nablus, and **Wahid ‘Abdallah**, a former mayor of ‘Anabta, were said to have been placed under house arrest.

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