

## **Israel/Occupied Territories: Israeli military action is collective punishment**

*The Palestinians must be hit and it must be painful. We must cause them losses, victims, so they feel the heavy price"*

*Ariel Sharon, Israeli Prime Minister, speaking to the press on 5 March*

-- Ibrahim Jazmawi, a medical assistant, died when a tank fired on two clearly marked ambulances of the Palestine Red Crescent Society on Tulkarem's main street while the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) were occupying the West Bank town on 7 March.

-- Samir Sadi Sababeh, aged 45, who was deaf and mute, was killed on 11 March by IDF soldiers when he failed to obey their summons to cross the main street of Jebaliya as they blew up buildings in the town.

These are just illustrative cases researched by Amnesty International delegates while in Israel and the Occupied Territories in March 2002. Findings from the delegates are being released today, as reports of human rights abuses keep coming in. Amnesty International is concerned that scores of Palestinians who posed no evident threat to the lives of others have been killed during Israel's military incursions into towns and villages in the Occupied Territories since 27 February 2002.

"The IDF's conduct raises concern that the main aim of the operation is to collectively punish all Palestinians," the organization's delegates declared, stressing that the Israeli army took actions which were not clearly or obviously justified by military necessity and which breached international human rights and humanitarian law.

The IDF killed and targeted medical personnel, ambulances and medical facilities, and fired randomly at houses and at people in the streets, even when curfews were lifted. Mass arbitrary arrests have been carried out in a manner designed to degrade those detained.

In al-Am'ari, Tulkarem and Deheisheh refugee camps all males aged between 16 and 45 were ordered to report to a specified place, often a school. They were sorted, handcuffed tightly with plastic strip-cuffs and blindfolded. According to consistent accounts, detainees have been ill-treated and kept without food and not allowed to go to the toilet for the first 24 hours of their detention.

Delegates saw remains of houses which had been destroyed by the IDF in acts of collective punishment.

"It seemed clear that most of these actions aimed at punishing and humiliating the Palestinian population as a whole," Amnesty International delegates said.

When the IDF occupied houses or apartment buildings which appeared to be in strategic positions, they systematically trashed people's homes, tearing clothes, breaking furniture and ripping books, including the Qur'an.

"In any army of the world, soldiers who behave like the IDF, destroying property and looting, should be immediately court martialled," added David Holley, an independent military adviser who was part of the delegation.

A partial IDF pull back took place after the arrival of US envoy Anthony Zinni on 14 March. However, the destruction and gross violations of human rights inflicted by the IDF reached unprecedented levels during the second wave of invasions. "Operation Defensive Wall" started on 29 March 2002 with an attack on President Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah and spread to five towns and some 30 villages in the West Bank. Ambulances and medical personnel have again been barred or hindered from removing and treating the sick and wounded. Journalists and non-governmental organizations have been unduly impeded in investigating the events.

Today in Jenin, the IDF is continuing operations largely in secret, with media, emergency medical services, the International Committee of the Red Cross and UN agencies denied access to the refugee camp. Since Jenin refugee camp is still barred to the outside world, reports that 35-40% of Palestinian homes have been demolished can not be confirmed. As one resident said to Amnesty International: "The camp smells of death. Bodies are buried under the rubble of houses; others were crushed by tanks and others still lie in the streets."

According to reports received by the organization Israeli troops are shooting at ambulances with people in them and tanks crushing empty ambulances, disrupting urgent medical services.

Amnesty International continues to repeat its call to the Israeli authorities to cease violations of human rights and humanitarian law and for international observers with a clear and transparent human rights mandate to be deployed in the region. The organization also continues to condemn all deliberate attacks on civilians by Palestinian armed groups which have left scores of Israelis dead or injured, and calls on Palestinian armed groups to cease targeting Israeli civilians and end unlawful killings of Palestinians suspected of "collaborating" with Israel.

**\*\*Amnesty International's Secretary General, Irene Khan, has written to the United Nations Security Council welcoming recent resolutions on Israel and the Occupied Territories and requesting the Security Council to: adopt measures for the effective protection of human rights of all Palestinians and Israelis; call on the Israeli government to allow immediate and unhindered access to all areas by medical personnel, the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as to lift undue impediments to access by observers, including journalists, non-governmental organizations, and other representatives of civil society; encourage the parties concerned to agree without further delay to an international human rights monitoring presence in the region to help prevent further serious and widespread abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law.**

**\*\* Amnesty International's report "Israel/Occupied Territories, The heavy price of Israeli incursions" (MDE 15/042/2002) is also available on the web.**

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