

Amnesty documents human rights abuses in Middle East

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The section on the Middle East and North Africa in Amnesty International's latest annual report covers 18 countries, as well as the Palestinian Authority.

It explains, "The human rights situation remained serious throughout much of the Middle East and North Africa with impunity largely prevailing and the victims and their families still denied justice."

Amnesty International continue, "The gross human rights violations that took place in many countries include judicial and extrajudicial executions, widespread use of torture and unfair trials, intimidation of human rights defenders and restrictions on freedom of expression and association".

Amongst the human rights abuses cited in 2001 are:

- * Confirmed or possible extrajudicial executions in at least three countries.

- * People "disappeared" or remaining "disappeared" from previous years in six countries.

- * Torture and ill treatment by security forces, police and other state authorities in 15 countries.

- * Cases of confirmed or possible prisoners of conscience reported in 12 countries.

- * People arbitrarily arrested and detained without charge or trial in seven countries.

- * Use of the death penalty in nine countries and executions carried out in at least seven.

- * The summary also states, "Armed opposition groups committed serious human rights violations, such as deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians, torture and hostage taking in three countries."

Israel

As the document refers to events in 2001, there is little information on the recent military campaign and atrocities against the Palestinian population by the Israeli government of Ariel Sharon. Notwithstanding this, the report reveals a picture of a brutal military

regime that routinely relies on the use of terror and intimidation. The document states that Israeli security forces killed more than 460 Palestinians and that 79 of these were children. Targeted assassinations were and remain a critical component of the strategy of the Sharon government and AI report that at least 32 individuals were targeted for assassination.

Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories continued to be maintained and sometimes expanded, the statement reports, and more than 350 Palestinian homes were destroyed in the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. As a result of these demolitions, 29 people died after delays prevented them from getting to hospitals. Curfews in these areas were also routinely imposed.

More than 2,200 Palestinians were arrested in the 12 months from January to December. Those arrested were, "frequently in incommunicado detention, sometimes for several days, and were reportedly subjected to torture or ill treatment". More than 1,000 were held in overcrowded tents in the Megiddo Prison and all prisoners were denied family visits due to the government imposed restriction on Palestinian movement. Hundreds were tried before military courts "whose procedures fell short of international standards."

Muna 'Ubayd, a teacher and a Palestinian citizen of Israel, was arrested in August 2001 on the pretext that she had contact with the Islamic Hezbollah organisation: 'Ubayd was held for 27 days in solitary confinement in the Petah Tikva Detention Centre: "during her interrogation she was reportedly manacled or tied to a chair, her blouse was pulled and she was thrown several times against the wall. She said she was frequently insulted and was threatened with the rape of her mother". 'Ubayd was not permitted to see a lawyer

for 10 days. She was placed in a constantly lit cell and subject to loud noise and moved three times for several hours to hospitals and to a psychiatric hospital.

At least 33 conscientious objectors were imprisoned during 2001.

The report also documents human rights abuses in the Palestinian Authority and states that hundreds of people and activists were arrested for “political reasons” during 2001. Many of those arrested were detained on charges of collaborating with the Israeli authorities and being suspected members of armed opposition groups. Three people are reported as having died in the custody of Palestinian security forces. The PA sentenced 12 people to death and two people were executed.

Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Iran

The section on Iraq draws attention to the imposition of crippling economic sanctions by the United Nations Security Council since 1990. The section states, “Iraq remained under stringent economic sanctions” and that these “reportedly resulted in severe hardship for the civilian population and a humanitarian crisis”.

Note is also made of the stepping up of the aerial bombing of the country by the United States and Britain. The report states, “Civilian deaths resulting from air strikes by US and UK forces against Iraqi targets inside the ‘air exclusion zones’ were reported during the year.” Targets were bombed in the capital, Baghdad, in February 2001. According to the Iraqi government, “a man and a woman died as a result of these attacks and more than 20 people were injured.” According to another Iraqi government report, on June 19, 2001, a further 23 people were killed when US and UK fighter aircraft bombed a football pitch in Tel Afr, west of Mosul in northern Iraq.

In Saudi Arabia the report found, “Grave and widespread human rights violations continued to be reported” under conditions of a “strictly secretive criminal justice system and the government policy of barring political parties, trade unions and independent human rights organisations.” Seventy-nine people were executed last year in Saudi Arabia, hundreds of teenagers were publicly flogged, political and religious activist were routinely arrested and “the legal status of those held from previous years remained shrouded in secrecy”. Prisoners are frequently tortured.

Over 5,000 Iraqi refugees, located at the Rafha camp in the northern desert near the border with Iraq, spent

their 10th year as “virtual prisoners”, denied the right to seek asylum in Saudi Arabia.

The inhumane treatment of women and children in Saudi Arabia is referred to in graphic terms. Last year, the Saudi government began a national campaign of summary floggings in defiance of a January 2001 recommendation from the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The organisation recommended that Saudi Arabia “take all necessary steps to end the imposition of corporal punishment including flogging and all forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment to persons who may have committed crimes while under 18.” Many of the children and older teenagers flogged had been charged with such offences as “talking to women, whistling at them, trying to pass telephone numbers to them, and wearing transparent or women’s-style clothes.”

AI notes, “hundreds of demonstrators were reportedly arrested in April [2001] in different parts of the country following protests against Israel’s military attacks on Palestinian territories.” The government were keeping secret the number of those detained.

Regarding Iran, the report found that there existed “increasing indications of social, regional and ethnic disquiet and unrest.” Large-scale violations of human rights were commonplace under the re-elected government of President Khatami. In July 2001 there were protests by clothing and shoe factory employees over unpaid wages. In the same month, student organisations marked the anniversary of a raid by the security forces on student dormitories in Tehran in 1999.

In 2001 at least 139 people, including one minor, were executed and 285 flogged. Two people were stoned to death and another victim was beheaded. Many of these executions were carried out in public.

The Amnesty International 2002 annual report can be read online at:

[http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/home/home?](http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/home/home?OpenDocument)
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