



Amnesty International

Group 524

November 2023



Israel/Gaza Prisoner Release News December Write For Rights Event

Welcome

I hope everyone is well and anticipating the Thanksgiving holiday. At our meeting on November 21, this month's focus is on Israel/Gaza and the upcoming Write For Rights event. We hope to see you there.

December Write For Rights Event

Group 39 Pittsburgh is sponsoring the annual Write For Rights event on December 11. *This event will take the place of our regular December meeting.* Their informational flyer is on page 2.

Prisoner Release News

This year there has been good news concerning the release of prisoners at Guantanamo and in Iran that we have previously advocated for. Details are on page 3.

Israel/Gaza

Amnesty is calling on President Biden to work for a cease-fire in this conflict. Amnesty's position is on page 4 and an action letter is on page 5. Other statements are on pages 6-8.

Amnesty International Group 524

Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 6:00 p.m.
Meeting Location: The Commons Residence Providence Heights
9000 Babcock Blvd.



Contact John Belch (joheb@aol.com or 412-766-1894) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA web site (www.amnestyusa.org) and Group 39's Amnesty Pittsburgh web site (www.amnestypgh.org).



Your letters can change lives



Join Amnesty International Group 39 and other human rights groups and community leaders for our 38th Write for Human Rights event.

Monday, December 11, 2023, 6:00-9:00pm

**Calvary Episcopal Church,
315 Shady Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15206**

Write a letter. Change a life.
Come for five minutes or the whole event.
Case information, letter writing materials and
light refreshments will be provided.

Attendees are encouraged to wear face coverings.



Please visit amnestypgh.org to learn more about this event, other Group 39 activities, or to make a donation

Contact: amnesty39@gmail.com



Amnesty Successes

Iran: Yasaman Aryani and Monireh Arabshahi Released From Prison

In February, Yasaman Aryani and Monireh Arabshahi were released from prison after serving four years of their 16 year sentence. They had been arbitrarily imprisoned in 2019 for speaking out against Iran's discriminatory forced veiling laws. Amnesty members worked tirelessly for their release including thousands who wrote letters on Aryani's behalf during Write for Rights 2019.



Guantanamo: Five Prisoners Released



Between February and April of 2023, Majid Khan, Ahmed Rahim Rabbini, Abdul Rahim Rabbani, Ghassan al-Sharbi and Said Bakush were finally released from the Guantanamo Bay detention center. At the start of the year-more than two decades after the U.S. government opened this offshore detention facility specifically to evade the rule of law-Guantanamo Bay still held 35 men. Most had never been charged with a crime. None had had a fair trial and many of the detainees were tortured. Amnesty has called on President Biden to finally right this wrong and transfer all remaining

detainees *who have not been charged with crimes* to countries where they will be safe and their human rights will be respected.



Amnesty International's Call for Action Concerning Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

AMNESTY IS CALLING ON PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN TO:

1. Call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties in the occupied Gaza Strip and Israel to prevent further loss of civilian lives and to ensure access to life-saving aid for people in Gaza amidst an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe;
2. Demand the lifting of restrictions on delivery of urgent humanitarian aid, including fuel, food and medical supplies, to the Gaza Strip in sufficient quantities to meet the dire needs of the civilian population, and urge the Israeli government to immediately restore Gaza's supply of electricity, water, fuel, and food and rescind the unlawful evacuation order;
3. Call for an end to unlawful attacks, including indiscriminate attacks, direct attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and disproportionate attacks.
4. Demand that Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza release all civilian hostages unconditionally and immediately and treat all those being held captive humanely, including by providing medical treatment, pending their release.
5. Demand the immediate suspension of the direct and indirect supply, sale, or transfer to the Israeli government of all weapons, munitions, and other military and security equipment, and make clear that the U.S. will not tolerate the perpetuation of war crimes or crimes against humanity with weapons it has provided to the Israeli government. We ask that the US government commit to implementing the administration's own policies regarding human rights and civilian harm reduction.
6. Call on the Israeli government to lift the unlawful 16-year blockade on Gaza, and dismantle its system of apartheid imposed over Palestinians. Support the International Criminal Court in urgently expediting its ongoing investigation into evidence of war crimes and other crimes under international law.

Group 524
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President Joseph Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Biden:

I write to you on behalf of Amnesty International USA with deep concern over the Israeli military offensive in Gaza and the escalation of violence in the West Bank and Israel. The U.S. government is uniquely positioned to have tremendous impact in this conflict to ensure the protection of civilians and the prevention of further suffering.

Since October 7, we have witnessed horror unfolding on an unimaginable scale in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. More than 2 million people in the Gaza Strip are struggling to survive amidst a catastrophic humanitarian crisis and the level of civilian casualties has been unprecedented. Over 8,805 people have been killed in Gaza and at least 1,400 in Israel and thousands more have been injured. More than 200 people have been taken hostage by Hamas. Serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes, by all parties to the conflict continue unabated.

I am calling on you to urgently intervene to protect civilians and prevent further suffering.

As a human rights activist, I urge you to use your power to demand that Israeli security forces and Palestinian armed groups make every effort to protect the lives of civilians and that the U.S. government does everything in its power to ensure the urgent and immediate provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza.

I urge you to: Call for an immediate ceasefire by all parties in the occupied Gaza Strip and Israel to prevent further loss of civilian lives and to ensure access to life-saving aid for people in Gaza amidst an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe

Sincerely,



IN RESPONSE TO RECENT RISING LEVELS OF HATE SPEECH, DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE ACROSS THE US, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PAUL O’BRIEN, MADE THIS STATEMENT:

“The recent surge in antisemitic, Islamophobic, anti-Palestinian/Arab rhetoric and attacks as well as incidents targeting other communities, such as the Sikh community in the USA, should concern everyone. We at Amnesty International USA condemn hate speech and violence in the strongest possible terms and demand action federal and local authorities to counter this surge.

“The escalating conflict in Gaza and Israel has spilled over to cities across the US. It has manifested as a rise in discriminatory rhetoric, along with threats and physical attacks targeting people who are or are perceived to be Jewish, Muslim, Palestinian or Arab.

“The list of heart-wrenching acts of hate continues to grow: Wade Al-Fayoume, a 6-year-old Palestinian boy, murdered, and his mother, Hanaan Shahin, seriously injured in Plainfield, Illinois; online threats against Palestinians in the Arab majority city of Dearborn, Michigan; a Cornell University student made violent threats against Jewish students; a hate crime investigation opened into the vehicular assault of an Arab Muslim student at Stanford University; suspicious packages with an envelope containing white, powdery substances were received by two synagogues in Seattle requiring removal by Hazmat teams.

“Incidents of vandalism and arson have occurred at religious institutions and associated facilities. Violence has also occurred between protesters and counter protesters at demonstrations, including a protest at Tulane University where violence erupted between groups when a pro-Palestinian protester attempted to ignite an Israeli flag, and a 69-year-old Jewish man died following an altercation with a counter protester in Thousand Oaks, California. High school and college students, other individuals and groups have been threatened and doxed for voicing their views about the conflict. And a movement has started to decertify and remove from campus university chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine.

“This collective trauma has created a climate of fear for all communities. Members of Muslim, Palestinian and Arab communities report experiencing an environment akin to the period immediately following the September 11, 2001 attacks when hate crimes and Islamophobic attacks surged. Jewish students and community members have expressed fear of being on campus or in their community and openly engaging in protest or discussion about the conflict.

“We must hold accountable — in our personal interactions, in our workplaces, in our communities, and in our activism — those who commit, encourage or acquiesce in such abuse and violence, whenever and wherever it is inflicted. Antisemitism, Islamophobia and targeting individuals and communities for their ethnicity or nationality are hatred. The right to be free from discrimination is a fundamental principle of human rights law, and all governments are obliged to combat discrimination in all its forms. The US government has a duty under international law to protect people from discrimination and incitement to violence based on identity. Likewise, governments, academic institutions and law enforcement have a responsibility to protect the right to freedom of expression and ensure that individuals feel safe in peacefully voicing their viewpoints during protests in public or on campus.

“We stand in solidarity with all who are targeted for their identity, and we reiterate our commitment to building a world in which every person can enjoy the full range of their human rights, free from hatred and discrimination.”



Israeli authorities have dramatically increased their use of administrative detention, a form of arbitrary detention, of Palestinians across the occupied West Bank; extended emergency measures that facilitate inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners; and failed to investigate incidents of torture and death in custody over the past four weeks, Amnesty International said today.

Since 7 October, Israeli forces have detained more than **2,200 Palestinian men and women**, according to the Palestinian Prisoners' Club. According to Israeli human rights organization HaMoked between 1 October and 1 November, **the total number of Palestinians held in administrative detention, without charge or trial, rose from 1,319 to 2,070.**

Testimony from released detainees and human rights lawyers, as well as video footage and images illustrate some of the forms of torture and other ill-treatment prisoners have been subjected to by Israeli forces over the past four weeks. These include severe beatings and humiliation of detainees, including by forcing them to keep their heads down, to kneel on the floor during inmate count, and to sing Israeli songs.

“Over the last month we have witnessed a significant spike in Israel’s use of administrative detention – detention without charge or trial that can be renewed indefinitely – which was already at a 20-year high before the latest escalation in hostilities on 7 October. Administrative detention is one of the key tools through which Israel has enforced its system of apartheid against Palestinians. Testimonies and video evidence also point to numerous incidents of torture and other ill-treatment by Israeli forces including severe beatings and deliberate humiliation of Palestinians who are detained in dire conditions,” said Heba Morayef, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

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Heba Morayef, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa

“The summary killings and hostage-taking by Hamas and other armed groups on 7 October are war crimes and must be condemned as such, but Israeli authorities must not use these attacks to justify their own unlawful attacks and collective punishment of civilians in the besieged Gaza Strip and the use of torture, arbitrary detention and other violations of the rights of Palestinian prisoners. The prohibition against torture can never be suspended or derogated from, including – and especially – at times like these.”



Amnesty International reiterates its call for the immediate and unconditional release of all civilian hostages, some of them children, who have been held in the occupied Gaza Strip for a month after being abducted by Hamas and other armed groups on October 7

Thousands of people have taken to the streets in Israel in recent days criticizing the Israeli government's response and demanding their loved ones be brought home. Last week, a video released by the Al Qassam Brigades – the military wing of Hamas – circulated online showing three civilian hostages being held in Gaza directing a message to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Recording and publicly sharing testimonies from hostages amounts to inhuman and degrading treatment.

“Hostage-taking and the abduction of civilians are prohibited by international law and are war crimes. Hostages must be treated humanely and in accordance with international law, not paraded in online videos or coerced into making statements,” said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International’s Secretary General. “Instead of using distressed civilian hostages as tools to score political points, Hamas should release them immediately and unconditionally. As a bare minimum they should grant independent monitors immediate access to visit the hostages to ensure their wellbeing and facilitate their communication with their families.”

The Israeli authorities have said that at least 240 civilian hostages and military captives remain held in Gaza but have not provided a breakdown of civilians and military captives. The hostages include 33 children, older people and foreigners or dual citizens, as well as Israeli soldiers. Four civilian hostages, all women, have been released by Hamas so far – two on October 20, both are US citizens, and two on October 24.

“We demand that Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in Gaza release all civilian hostages immediately, unharmed, and unconditionally. We are calling on the US government to do everything in its power to advance an immediate ceasefire as the most effective way to protect all civilians in this horrific conflict, including by facilitating the safe release of hostages.” – Paul O’Brien, Executive Director of Amnesty International USA.

As Israel’s brutal siege and relentless bombardment of Gaza continues and the devastating civilian death toll continues to rise, the organization also reiterates its call for an immediate ceasefire, its call to protect all civilians, and its call to ensure vital aid access amidst a manmade humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

“Israel’s relentless bombardment of Gaza, including through unlawful, indiscriminate attacks, has killed more than 10,000 Palestinians including 4,200 children, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. It also endangers civilians who are being held hostage in Gaza and ignores appeals from Israeli families to prioritize the wellbeing of hostages during their operations,” said Agnès Callamard.