



**A Spectrum of Light in the
Middle East**

June-July, 2004

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About The Prism Group

The Prism Group focuses on several key issues and is pleased to see that its efforts are causing "spectrums of awareness" in many places. This newsletter focuses on human rights in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority. We look forward to your feedback.

Human Rights: Changing the world for the better

A few weeks ago, Amnesty International published its Annual Report for 2004, citing human rights violations around the world.

Launching *Annual Report 2004: War on Global Values – Human Rights Under Attack by Armed Groups and Governments*, AI said that "violence by armed groups and increasing violations by governments have combined to produce the most sustained attack on human rights and international humanitarian law in 50 years."

According to Agence France Presse, on May 26, 2004, *Amnesty Slams "Bankrupt" Vision of US in Damning Rights Report*, AI's Secretary General Irene Khan stated that "governments and armed groups have launched a war on global values, destroying the human rights of ordinary people." While governments have been obsessed with Iraq, she said, they have ignored the real weapons of mass destruction - injustice and impunity, poverty, discrimination and racism, the uncontrolled trade in small arms, violence against women and abuse of children.

In the Middle East, both Israel and the Palestinian Authority were taken to task for alleged rights violations, with AI stating that some actions by the Israeli army, such as the destruction of property, "constituted war crimes".

This month's newsletter is dedicated to a discussion of human rights in Israel and the Palestinian Authority-controlled territories.

Child Combatants

On May 17, the PA began calling for "women, children and the elderly" to stand in front of Israeli bulldozers and tanks in Rafah and make an "impassable barrier" despite the fact that it was an armed battle between the Israeli army and Palestinian terrorists. The call was answered by thousands of civilians, who marched directly into the heart of the battle. [*Al-Ayyam*, May 17, 2004]

Then, on June 6, PA TV displayed the pictures of two 15-year-old combatants holding an assault rifle and a pistol. It was reported that these children were killed while attacking an Israeli town in 2003, and have been honored by PA society for their deed as heroic *Shahids* (Martyrs). The text accompanying the picture of the dead children reads: "The Popular Resistance Committee proudly announce the falling of Shahids of the Great Islam."

Since 2001, more than 40 minors who were involved in planning bombings have been arrested. Article 38 of the 1989 UN Convention of the Rights of the Child states that "persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities."

Death sentences

Reuters recently reported that the Arab League intends to cite Israel for war crimes and the violation of human rights, planning to bring these issues to the International Court of Justice. However, it is interesting to note that [The Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group \(PHRMG\)](#), a Palestinian initiative to document violations of human rights against Palestinians, published the following:

- ⊗ The Palestinian Authority (PA) has sentenced to death 66 of its own Palestinian citizens, many without proper trial.
- ⊗ 31 Palestinians have died in while in PA custody.
- ⊗ In a recent PHRMG report: "In the 10 year period from 1993 to 2003, 16% of Palestinian civilian deaths were caused by Palestinian groups or individuals".

An article in the New York Times (March 3, 2004) quotes Ziad Abu Amr , PA Minister of Information under Abu Mazen: "*Israel bears a great deal of responsibility, but I blame the Palestinian Authority for not doing what it should. We see almost daily violations of public order and the authority does nothing. There is no accountability.*"

Extrajudicial killings

The Israeli army carried out an extrajudicial execution of Hamas' leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin on 22 March 2004 in the Gaza Strip and his successor Abdel Aziz Rantisi on 18 April. The March attack also resulted in the unlawful killing of seven other Palestinians and the injury of many more.

The Aksa Martyrs Brigade publicly executed Muhammad Daraghmeh, age 45, On July 2 in the town of Kabatiya. Since the beginning of the year, at least 15 Palestinians have been killed by Palestinian forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for collaborating with Israel.

Financial Corruption

More than 130 members of the Palestinian security forces protested against epidemic levels of corruption among senior officers. They stated that in addition to stealing salaries and supplies, senior officers were turning the security forces into private fiefdoms. They also stated that the children and wives of officers had been put on the payroll of security agencies. They requested immediate reforms and the dismissal of the PA security chief.

Of course, Israel is no stranger to financial corruption. An article on the website www.intellectualconservative.com by Ariel Natan Pasko (January 6, 2004) emphasises that "Israel must reform itself until scandal and corruption are an exception..." Rarely a day goes by without an Israeli newspaper reporting about the prime minister's questionable loans, the ex-prime minister's phony organizations, double voting and bribery in the Israeli Parliament. Then there's Israel's electric and water company employees with the highest paid salaried workforce in the country – twice the national average.

According to Pasko "industrial democracy in Israel is a farce." A small group of oligarchs run the unions, decide when to strike and essentially hold the Israeli economy hostage. It is interesting to note that Israel has one of the highest number of annual strike days of any country in the world.

Freedom of movement

Israel claims that the separation fence/wall currently under construction, which consists of fences and concrete walls, is intended to prevent the passage of terrorists into Israeli territory. "Israel has a right and duty to protect its civilians from attack, but it must not use means that entail indiscriminate punishment of entire communities," said Joe Stork, acting executive director of the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch, where and when? "Israel's separation barrier seriously impedes Palestinian access to essentials of civilian life: work, education and medical care."

The Human Rights Watch briefing paper argues that the barrier imposes arbitrary and excessive restrictions on the freedom of movement of tens of thousands of Palestinians and violates Israel's obligation under the Geneva Conventions to ensure the welfare of the population under occupation. However, it is interesting to note that a recent report by Israeli police shows that local crime and incidents of suicide bombings have been reduced significantly since the construction of the fence.

Freedom of the press

According to a new Freedom House study, "Freedom of the Press 2004: A Global Survey of Media Independence". Israel is the only Middle Eastern country with a free press. Of the 19 Middle Eastern and North African countries, only one, Israel, is rated "Free," with 90% of the countries in the region rated "Not Free."

Women's Rights

UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women states that "*violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women... whether occurring in public or in private life.*"

Murdering women to preserve family honour is a phenomenon of Arab and Palestinian society. *Burned Alive*, an autobiographical account, recently published in the UK by Bantam Books, describes how Souad's brother set her on fire. Unmarried and pregnant, her story reveals the horror of repression of women.

See a [review of the book Burned Alive](#) on the Prism Group website.

Palestinian women have also been forced to become suicide bombers to preserve family honour. See the stories of Andalib Taqtaqah, Ayat Al Akhras, Reem al-Riyashi and many more.

The Prism Group Website:

Please visit our site and help direct others to the existing fact sheets. If you have ideas for fact sheets that you believe we should investigate and compile, please write to us at: info@theprismgroup.org.

Our web site is www.theprismgroup.org.

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