

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Palestinian Authority: Alan Johnston should be released and the Palestinian Authority should heighten efforts to ensure respect for the rule of law

Amnesty International today renewed its call for the immediate release of Alan Johnston, the BBC correspondent who is being held by an unknown armed group in the Gaza Strip, and urged the Palestinian Authority (PA) to redouble its efforts to secure his freedom and to end all hostage-taking by Palestinian armed groups.

The organization said the continuing abduction of Alan Johnston, who was seized by Palestinian gunmen in the Gaza Strip on 12 March 2007, was particularly worrying and that it was greatly concerned for his safety. He has now been held for 17 days, longer than any other journalist kidnapped in the Gaza Strip. His case has aroused widespread protest. Palestinians have held rallies in Gaza demanding his release while Palestinian journalists in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank held last week a strike in his support. But, as yet, his captors have released no information about him.

Amnesty International said that Alan Johnston's kidnapping and disappearance was the latest in a series of abductions and other acts of lawlessness, especially in the Gaza Strip, which stem from a long-standing problem of impunity and the failure of the PA government to ensure the rule of law. More than 80 Palestinians have been killed during the past three months, including civilians, many of them in armed clashes between Palestinian armed groups and PA security force units aligned either with PA President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party or the Hamas movement which formed a government after winning the January 2006 elections. Kidnappings have also been rife but in previous cases journalists abducted have been freed unharmed usually within hours or a few days. As yet, no-one has been brought to justice for these abuses.