

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 21/012/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 119  
25 June 2007

### **Palestinian Authority: Amnesty International renews its appeal for release of Alan Johnston**

Amnesty International is greatly concerned by the continuing threat to the life of Alan Johnston, who has now been missing for more than 100 days since his abduction in Gaza City on 12 March by a Palestinian armed group calling itself the "Army of Islam." The organization is making a renewed appeal to his captors to release Alan Johnston immediately and is calling on both Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and the leaders of Hamas who currently exercise control over Gaza to redouble their efforts to obtain his safe release.

On 24 June, the "Army of Islam" released a new video showing BBC news reporter Johnston wearing what he described in the video as an explosive belt. He said that his captors had threatened to detonate the belt if the hideout where he is being held is stormed to force his release.

Alan Johnston states in the video: "The situation now is very serious. As you can see I have been dressed in what is an explosive belt, which the kidnappers say will be detonated if there was any attempt to storm this area," adding that: "Captors tell me that very promising negotiations were ruined when the Hamas movement and the British government decided to press for a military solution to this kidnapping."

It is believed that the release of the video may be in response to an ultimatum issued by the recently deposed Palestinian Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyeh, whose Hamas party remains in de-facto control of the Gaza Strip, who earlier on in the day had stated in a speech: "We will not allow the continuation of the abduction of the British journalist. The issue of Alan Johnston must end."

Hostage taking is a grave violation of international law and can never be justified. Amnesty International urges the abductors of Alan Johnston to release him immediately.

#### **Background**

Abductions and other acts of lawlessness perpetrated by Palestinian armed groups and gangs, especially in the Gaza Strip, stem from the failure of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in recent years to ensure the rule of law and address impunity.

Some 350 Palestinians, including scores of unarmed civilian bystanders, have been killed in the past six months in the Gaza Strip in clashes between rival Palestinian armed groups and PA security forces affiliated with PA President Abbas's Fatah party or with the recently deposed Prime Minister Haniyeh's Hamas party.

Earlier this month the armed clashes which have been raging between the two sides since Hamas's election victory in early 2006 reached an unprecedented level earlier this month and after a week of intense fighting Hamas militants took control of all the PA security forces installations and other government buildings in the Gaza Strip.

President Abbas in response dismissed Prime Minister Haniyeh, disbanded the government, declared a state of emergency and appointed a new emergency government headed by former Finance Minister Salam Fayyad. However, Hamas remains in control of the Gaza Strip and the authority of the new emergency government is confined to the West Bank.

Impunity for Palestinian armed groups from both sides who are responsible for human rights abuses remains rife, as the PA judicial system is in disarray and virtually paralyzed and the new Fatah-led emergency government has yet to take the necessary steps to end this lawlessness.

