

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 21/013/2007

25 June 2007

Further Information on UA 81/07 (MDE 21/005/2007, 05 April 2007) and follow-up (MDE 21/007/2007, 09 May 2007 and 1 June 2007) – Fear for Safety

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Alan Johnston (m), British national, journalist

On 24 June a Gaza-based Palestinian armed group calling itself "Army of Islam" released a video showing BBC news reporter Alan Johnston wearing what he described as an explosive belt and saying that his captors have threatened to detonate the belt if the hideout is stormed to force his release.

Alan Johnston, who has been missing since his abduction in Gaza City on 12 March, 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 kidnapers 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 INFORMATION

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.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or English or your own language:

- following the release of a video on 24 June, purportedly by the "Army of Islam" armed group, showing Alan Johnston apparently wearing an explosive belt, calling on the PA and on Hamas to ensure that the BBC journalist is released safely and immediately.

APPEALS TO:

Mahmoud Abbas
President
Office of the President
Ramallah
Palestinian Authority

Fax: +972 2 296 3170 - +972 2 296 1370 (or alternative country code: +970 instead of 972)

Salutation: Dear President

Isma'il Abd al Salam Ahmad Haniyeh
 Hamas Leadership
 Gaza City
 Palestinian Authority

Fax: +972 8 282 2159 - +972 8 288 4815 - + 972 8 288 4493
(or alternative country code: +970 instead of 972)

Salutation: Dear Mr Haniyeh

COPIES TO:

Diplomatic representatives of the Palestinian Authority accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 July 2007.