



الهيئة الفلسطينية المستقلة لحقوق المواطن

The Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights

Date: 2 April 2008

## March 2008 Report on Human Rights Violations

### Increasing Deaths Resulting from Collapsing Tunnels in Rafah Rising Killings Due to Family Fights and Acts of Revenge over March 2008

Based on monitoring and documentation carried out by the **Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (ICHR)**, the number of citizens killed in family fights and acts of revenge rose. In addition, several citizens were reported to have died as tunnels collapsed along the Palestinian-Egyptian border in the area of Rafah.

#### **1. Violation of the Right to Life and Physical Safety:**

Compared to 10 citizens killed in February 2008, **ICHR** reported that 20 citizens lost their lives in incidents of security chaos and local instability, as well as due to lacking conditions of public safety in the controlled territory of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Of these fatalities, 11 citizens were killed in the Gaza Strip and 8 in the West Bank. 10 citizens died in acts of revenge and family fights, including 7 in the West Bank and 3 in the Gaza Strip.

On 28 March 2008, the gravest incident of family fights and revengeful acts took place in the village of Kafr Thulth in the governorate of Qalqiliya in the West Bank. After two families concluded a conciliation of a dispute that had arisen after a member of one these families got killed around a year ago, a number of individuals opened fire, killing 3 citizens and injuring 7 others.

On 11 March, 2 citizens were killed and others injured during a family fight, which took place in the Ash Shuja'iya neighbourhood in the Gaza City.

In an exchange of fire arising in the aftermath of a family revenge, 2 citizens were also slain on 11 March in the town of As Silat al Harithiya south of the city of Jenin in the West Bank.

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As a result of arms abuse, 3 members of the 'Izz ad Din Al Qassam Brigades' died in Khan Yunis and Gaza on 20 and 21 March respectively.

In a major incident of arms abuse, *Safiya Mahmoud Mahdi*, a 75-year-old female citizen, died on 5 March, after she sustained a bullet wound in the stomach. *Safiya* was standing outside her boutique in the Ash Shati' Refugee Camp. A bullet was fired by a police officer guarding a house belonging to Isma'il Haniya, the deposed Prime Minister in the former Palestinian government, in the area.

In the West Bank, a citizen died under obscure circumstances. Despite the fact that Palestinian security forces declared that they detained a number of suspects, conditions surrounding the citizen's death are still unknown.

In the last month, 6 citizens also died of suffocation after established tunnels or tunnels under construction caved in along the Palestinian-Egyptian border in the city of Rafah. Additionally, **ICHR** reported that 30 citizens were injured in incidents of infighting and security instability. However, the majority of these injuries were reported to have taken place in family fights as well as in acts of revenge.

## **2. Violations against Freedom of Opinion and Expression:**

Over March 2008, **ICHR** reported a number of violations to have been committed against the freedom of opinion and expression as well as the media freedom:

1. In the West Bank, Palestinian security forces have continued to detain a number of journalists.
2. On 4 March, the *de facto* authority in the Gaza Strip issued a decision preventing *Adel az Za'noun* and *Sameer Khalifah*, correspondents at the Palestine Broadcasting Corporation, from covering any events in the Gaza Strip, including Israeli aggressions. Ihab al Ghasin, spokesperson of the Ministry of Information, summoned the aforesaid decision to the affected correspondents.

## **3. Attacks on Public and Private Institutions and Property:**

During the month of March, **ICHR** reported that 3 attacks were committed against public and private institutions and property.

In the Gaza Strip, an internet café and cafeteria were destroyed (using explosives). On 15 March, unidentified individuals also attacked the office of the Yatta Women's Centre in the governorate of Hebron and burned it to the ground. Reasons behind the attack are still unknown.

On 26 March, a homemade rocket landed on a civilian house in the vicinity of the American School north of the town of Beit Lahiya, critically injuring a female citizen and gravely damaging the house.

#### **4. Attacks on Personal Security and Arrests:**

Over the past month, **ICHR** reported dozens of arrests that have been carried out by the Palestinian security agencies in the West Bank, which mainly targeted Hamas members and activists.

In the Gaza Strip, police forces of the deposed government also arrested dozens of activists arbitrary for their political affiliations. Moreover, scores of citizens are still being held in detention centres on political backgrounds in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

#### **5. Attacks on Academic Freedom:**

During the month of March, **ICHR** monitored a number of violations of the academic freedom. Of these, the *de facto* authority in the Gaza Strip changed the higher administration board at the Science and Technology College in Khan Yunis.

Despite refusal to hold it, the Islamic Bloc organised a festival commemorating the anniversary of Sheikh Ahmed Yaseen's death on campus of the Al Azhar University on 30 March. As a result, confrontations took place between students affiliated with the Islamic Bloc, administrative staff and Students Council on campus. Meanwhile, Police officers of the *de facto* authority assaulted a number of professors, administrative staff, and students who attempted to organise a sit-in protest outside the university campus. Consequently, the University's Administration decided to suspend classes.

Over March, **ICHR** reported that some university administrations in the Gaza Strip prevented various student blocs from carrying out activities on political or ideological backgrounds.

#### **6. Seizing Control of Shari'a Courts and Preventing Judges from Holding their Office:**

Further infringing judicial independence and in implementation of a decision made by Hasan al Joujou, a dismissed judge, Police forces of the *de facto* government prevented judges at Shari'a Courts from carrying out their duties at the Courts of Gaza, Ash Sheikh Radhwan, Bani Suheila, Khan Yunis, Deir al Balah, Rafah and Ash Shuja'iya.

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