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Special Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
15 November 2006

Oral Statement by Amnesty International

Mr. President,

This is already the second special session of the Human Rights Council focused on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories. It also follows action taken on the situation in Palestine by the Council at its first session. So far the Council has had little or no impact on protecting the human rights of people living in the areas affected by the ongoing crisis. Amnesty International hopes that this session will mark a turning point at which the full membership of the Council moves away from rhetoric towards practical measures to halt the abuses of human rights and to protect the human rights of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and other Occupied Territories and Israel.

Amnesty International reiterates its serious concerns about grave violations and abuses of human rights in the Occupied Territories and in Israel. The attack on 8 November by Israeli forces which killed 18 members of the Athamne family in Beit Hanoun was only one in a series of Israeli attacks that have claimed the lives of some 600 Palestinians, more than half of them unarmed civilians - including more than 100 children, and have wounded hundreds more since the beginning of 2006. Many of these deaths and injuries have been a result of deliberate and reckless Israeli artillery shelling and air strikes into densely populated residential areas.

Until attacks by both Israel and Palestinian armed groups cease, the number of unarmed civilian victims will continue to grow.

Amnesty International calls once again on all members of the Human Rights Council to show determination to work together to alleviate this human rights crisis and take measures to ensure that all concerned parties - the Israeli authorities and also the Palestinian Authority (PA) and armed groups - comply with their obligations to abide by international law and to respect fundamental rights.

Amnesty International calls for the urgent establishment of an independent mechanism with a presence in the affected areas to monitor and oversee compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law by both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Such mechanism should be:

- mandated to investigate alleged violations on the ground wherever they occur;
- mandated to report its findings publicly, with a view to ensuring that those responsible for human rights abuses, including war crimes, are promptly brought to justice;

- adequately resourced to enable it to carry out its mandate fully and effectively.

At the same time, the international community should take steps to ensure that no funds, equipment or training that may be used, directly or indirectly, to commit abuses of human rights and humanitarian law is provided to Israel or to the Palestinian Authority or to Palestinian armed groups while the current abuses continue.

Amnesty International believes that the establishment of an independent monitoring and reporting mechanism would contribute to ending the current atmosphere of impunity, which prevails for those responsible for unlawful killings and other grave human rights abuses. It calls on the Human Rights Council to establish such a mechanism without delay and ensure its rapid deployment.

Thank you Mr. President.