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PALESTINIANS AMONG THOUSANDS TORTURED IN SYRIA IN RECENT YEARS, SAYS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Palestinians arrested or kidnapped in Lebanon have been among thousands of political victims of torture in Syria in recent years, Amnesty International said today (Wednesday 28 October).

In a new report, the worldwide human rights organization says torture is a regular experience for political prisoners in Syria and that anyone suspected of opposing the government of President Assad is at risk.

The report describes gross and systematic abuses inflicted by the security forces on detainees arrested in Syria, including Palestinians from refugee camps, and on other detainees seized in Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon.

Many of the latter were first tortured in Lebanon and then transferred to Syria for further interrogation under torture. They include kidnapped Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians, and also many of the hundreds of Palestinians handed over to the Syrians by the Amal militia in February 1987.

The report says at least five powerful security units have for years arrested people in Syria at will, often without explanation, and tortured them during periods of incommunicado detention that have sometimes lasted for several years.

The victims have included students, lawyers, housewives and soldiers. Citing the case of Riad al-Turk, 58, a lawyer detained incommunicado without charge or trial since 1980, the report says he was admitted to hospital intensive care wards three years running as a result of repeated

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Amnesty International is an independent worldwide movement working impartially for the release of all prisoners of conscience, fair and prompt trials for political prisoners and an end to torture and executions. It is funded by donations from its members and supporters throughout the world. It has formal relations with the United Nations, Unesco, the Council of Europe, the Organization of African Unity and the Organization of American States.

torture. After one torture session in 1984 he was said to be suffering from kidney failure, to be deaf in one ear and to have a broken arm and leg.

Another victim, Ahmad al-Kabra, 43, a Palestinian from al-Yarmuk refugee camp in Damascus, is said to have died under torture several months after his arrest in 1985.

Savage beatings with fists and sticks and whippings with leather belts and electric cable are the usual forms of torture reported, but Amnesty International says it has received descriptions of at least 35 different methods used, many inflicted in specially equipped torture chambers.

Among the methods cited are the "Black Slave", in which the victim is strapped on to a device that inserts a heated metal skewer into the anus, and the "Washing Machine", in which the victim's arms and fingers are crushed in a rotating drum. Some detainees tortured on the "Syrian Chair" are said to have suffered fractured vertebrae and near-strangulation. Victims are also said to have had their hair and nails pulled out, to have been given electric shocks and to have been sexually abused.

Torture is inflicted mainly to extract confessions or incriminate others but has also been used to punish, intimidate or humiliate prisoners or to force them to sign papers renouncing political affiliations.

The cases of 10 detainees said to have died as a result of torture between 1983 and 1987 are highlighted, including that of a soldier, Sulaiman Mustafa Ghaibur, who died after arrest in Aleppo in 1986 after refusing to incriminate a political suspect.

Amnesty International says torture of detainees often starts soon after arrest, continues throughout interrogation and goes on after transfer to prison.

Prisoners at Tadmur Military Prison in the Homs Desert, for instance, are said to be routinely whipped, kicked and punched, and regularly to have cigarettes stubbed out on their bodies and their faces cut with razors. Most prisoners are said to suffer from swollen hands, feet, eyes and faces, flayed skin on their backs, broken teeth and fainting spells.