



## *On the Record: Palestinian Civil Society Under Siege*

### **Issue 8: In Defense of Human Rights**

#### **Contents**

- From the Editorial Desk: A Question of Balance
- The Critic
- The Security Courts
- Struggle for Democracy
- Resisting Intimidation
- The Struggle Over Independent NGOs
- The Battle for International Public Opinion
- On the Trail of Torture
- Preventive Detention
- Leaving the Door Open to Torture
- The Scars Remain
- Raji Sourani: 'There Can Be No Peace Without Justice'

#### **From the Editorial Desk: A Question of Balance**

Human rights have been so consistently violated in the Palestinian territories that anyone working for social change could reasonably claim to be working for human rights. That is certainly the case with the eight Palestinian organizations that met with this delegation and are supported by Grassroots International.

This issue looks at the work of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) in Gaza. Of the eight organizations mentioned above, the PCHR bears the closest resemblance to the classic human rights monitor. It was established in 1995 by Raji Sourani, a prominent Palestinian lawyer who defended Palestinian political prisoners under occupation and was himself detained several times by the Israelis.

Sourani has received many international prizes, including the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial award for human rights, and in the last five years the PCHR has acquired an international reputation. Grassroots International supports the work of the PCHR's legal unit.

Sourani and his colleagues have been working at fever pitch to monitor abuses committed by the Israeli forces since the outbreak of the current uprising last September. Their output has fallen somewhat from the two daily press releases that they issued in the immediate aftermath of the uprising. But they still manage to collect and disseminate an extraordinary amount of information under difficult and dangerous conditions.

Complementing this work, Sourani has also been engaged in frantic non-stop lobbying to secure

international protection for Palestinian civilians. This took him to this year's spring meeting of the UN's Human Rights Commission in Geneva, where he made the same point to government delegations that he made to this delegation -- that the root cause of the abuse remains Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The task of monitoring Israeli violations is all-consuming, but the PCHR cannot afford to forget that its calling is to defend the rule of law with impartiality. This explains why the PCHR continues to criticize the Palestinian Authority at a time of national crisis, even if this means swimming against the tide of public opinion.

For example, the PCHR has strongly opposed the death penalty for Palestinians who have been convicted by security courts of 'collaboration' with Israel. This has not endeared Sourani and his colleagues to those Palestinians who are desperate to hit back at Israel by any means, but the PCHR has long insisted that the security courts fail to provide even a minimal standard for legal defense. If anything, they are more dangerous at a time of extreme crisis, where there is a greater temptation to discard legal safeguards.

The PCHR's commitment to even-handed justice remains an article of faith. Sourani underlined this by introducing us to a Palestinian professor who was severely tortured by the Palestinian Authority. The professor's story can be read later in this issue.

But while Sourani believes in balance when it comes to human rights, he does not believe in neutrality. He is particularly critical of those who have gone out of their way to find some equivalence between the abuses on the two sides -- Palestinian and Israeli -- in order to make their conclusions more palatable to Israel.

This, to Sourani, has been a feature of the way the uprising has been presented in the United States since the start. It is profoundly distorting because it ignores the difference in scale and implies that the use of military might by a powerful modern state can be equated with acts of terrorism. The Israeli government claims to be upholding the rule of law and expects to be held accountable. But suicide bombers are choosing the opposite course and rejecting law by their terrible actions. This is why Israel's calculated assault against Palestinian civilians is -- in some ways -- more shocking.

Sourani is struggling to find a difficult balance. A human rights monitor must always be impartial in defending the rule of law. But he or she can never afford to be neutral in the face of violations, because neutrality is tantamount to inaction.

That was the lesson of Bosnia and Rwanda where the result was genocide. From their bleak vantage point, Sourani and other Palestinian human rights activists would say that this message has still not sunk in.

### **The Critic**

Raji Sourani likes to show visitors his collection of spent cartridges, shell casings, and pieces of metal shrapnel that once came shrieking down from the sky. They sit on his desk, near photos of

him in the company of foreign dignitaries. This is clearly a man who has taken risks in his life and emerged with distinction.

When we met him in February 2001, Sourani was living on his nerves. The lines of exhaustion were deeply etched on his face. After six months of violence, he was still shocked by the ferocity of Israel's assault and amazed that Israel felt able to operate with complete impunity -- as if the normal standards of decency and human rights do not apply.

And yet it was the Palestinians who were consistently denounced as 'terrorists' -- at least in the United States. This has left Sourani angry and frustrated. As a Palestinian, he resented the double standard. As a human rights defender, he saw it as a threat to the universality of human rights and an invitation to more violence.

When we talked, Sourani was also deeply worried for the safety of his colleagues. Two of his six field monitors working in Gaza had been injured collecting information. He shook his head as he recounted the list of monitors -- some of them foreign dignitaries -- who had been intimidated by Israeli forces in Gaza.

The dangers facing the PCHR's monitors have increased since our visit in late February. In May, a shell smashed into the house next door to the main office in Gaza City, showering the office with broken glass.

One of Sourani's co-workers wrote to us about the incident: 'If I had stayed at work late, as I had been thinking of doing, I would be dead or very seriously wounded because the window above my desk shattered with extreme force all over my chair and desk. I am starting to feel that there is only so much you can do to keep safe. The rest is out of my hands.'

### **The Security Courts**

It takes a particular type of person to stand up to this sort of pressure, and Raji Sourani clearly fills the bill. He is impatient, outspoken, independent, and not at all inclined to compromise.

These qualities have emerged most clearly in respect to the Palestinian Authority. As Sourani himself put it in the book 'Speak Truth to Power': 'As local human rights organizations, we thought that the struggle for the development of this democratic society and the strengthening of Palestinian civil society would be easier than the struggle against the Israeli occupation. Now we see we were wrong; it is a deeply complex process and much more difficult than we imagined. We are deeply concerned by certain practices of the Palestinian Authority which violate human rights' standards, including restrictions on the freedom of expression and assembly, undermining the independence of the judiciary, and the establishment of state security courts.'<sup>[1]</sup>

One of the reasons for these abusive practices is that Oslo gave the Palestinian Authority the task of guaranteeing security -- and controlling Palestinian 'extremists.' Over a third of the Authority's annual budget goes into security.

In 1995, Arafat signed a presidential decree establishing a State Security Court (SSC) with

jurisdiction over 'security offenses.' These courts have never respected even minimum legal standards, and in the words of a Grassroots International backgrounder on human rights, they 'operate as secret military tribunals where summary judgments are passed in the complete absence of due process. Sentences are not open to appeal.'

Many of the courts' verdicts have been based on a 1979 military law of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and several have imposed the death penalty. By November 2000, the security and military courts had passed 32 death sentences, of which three have been carried out. This delegation was told that in 1995 twelve detainees died from torture.

Since 1995, the full force of the Palestinian security apparatus has been turned against critics of the Oslo peace process, particularly Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement). Hamas members have been arrested for long periods of preventive detention, and they are routinely mistreated. Of the 100 or so Palestinians in detention at the end of 1999, 80 were Hamas supporters who had been jailed since 1996. [2]

Whatever one thinks of the politics of Hamas, this was an affront to the rule of law, and it presented human rights monitors with a profound and unexpected challenge.

### **Struggle for Democracy**

Sourani has defended the rule of law in Gaza from every possible angle during the last five years. Every relevant incident has been recorded, no matter how trivial. When two Palestinian workers were electrocuted by high-pressure electricity lines in a refugee camp, the PCHR called on the electricity company to tighten up its security procedures. It protested when thugs invaded the university campus and attacked some students. The fact that 12 Palestinians died in 1999 from the 'misuse of weapons,' said the PCHR, showed a 'lack of concern for the basic security and dignity of Palestinian civilians.' [3]

The PCHR has also pushed hard to ensure that the structures of government are as democratic as they can possibly be under the circumstances. Under Oslo, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), or parliament, was supposed to adopt a 'basic law' (equivalent to a constitution) by May 4, 1999. (This was five years after the Oslo interim agreement entered into force.) The text of a law was approved in 1997 but never enacted, and no elections were held when the term of the PLC expired. (Our delegation was told that this was partly at the advice of Israel and the United States, which warned Arafat that he might well lose the election.) All this, suggested the PCHR, had produced a 'situation of anarchy' and called into question the basic legitimacy of the Council. [4]

All of these challenges were consistent with Sourani's fundamental argument: no matter what kind of government is in power, Palestinian society must respect the rule of law if it is to flourish and survive: 'We, the Palestinian human rights community, believed from the very beginning that it was essential to both our self-respect as a people, and for the ultimate achievement of our goal of a democratic state, that the practices of the Palestinian Authority, in the very limited areas in which it was granted jurisdiction under the Oslo Accords, be closely monitored.' [5]

## **Resisting Intimidation**

The barrage of criticism from the PCHR would have tested the patience of a seasoned democratic government, let alone a shaky administration like the Palestinian Authority that lacks the formal status of a government and is surrounded on all sides by an occupying force.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Authority has responded to its Palestinian critics with threats and intimidation. After the PCHR publicly complained when the security courts sentenced a prisoner (Abu Saada) to death in August 1999, General Ghazi Jabali, the head of the Palestinian police force, complained publicly that the PCHR appeared to be more concerned with satisfying its foreign funders than building a Palestinian state.

For good measure, copies of the general's letter were sent to all police stations throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip 'to acquaint them with the position of Raji Sourani and human rights organizations.'

Sourani responded by enlisting the support of Dr. Anis El Qasem, a noted lawyer who had served as the legal advisor to the Palestinian delegation at the 1991 Madrid conference. Dr. El Qasem disputed the general's letter point by point. His analysis was then sent out around PCHR's local and international network.[6]

On occasion, the intimidation has turned violent. Dr. Eyad El Sarraj, the head of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (profiled in issue 4 of this series) was arrested several times by Palestinian security officials for criticizing the mistreatment of Palestinian detainees. On one occasion he was held in solitary confinement for seventeen days in an underground cell and tortured so badly that he had to go to Denmark for specialized treatment.

But this only increased the determination of human rights campaigners. When El Sarraj again ran into trouble with the Authority in the summer of 1999, the PCHR sprang to his defense with a series of press releases that were sent out through the PCHR's formidable international network.

## **The Struggle Over Independent NGOs**

In all likelihood, the PCHR's press releases on behalf of El Sarraj would have reached the Western governments that were subsidizing the Authority. This would have further antagonized Authority officials who deeply resent that the large nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have independent sources of income and direct lines of communication to foreign governments. The Oslo years saw a long and rugged dispute between the Authority and NGOs. The Authority was determined to regulate NGOs, and the NGOs were equally determined to maintain their independence. This has produced a finely balanced law that places NGOs under the Interior Ministry but allows them to receive independent funding.

The compromise is acceptable to almost all the major NGOs but not to the PCHR. Sourani told this delegation that he objects to the manner in which it was eventually adopted by parliament. Sourani and his colleagues are also concerned that the law will place NGOs under the control of the Interior Ministry.

All the other organizations that we met shared this concern, but at the same time most have also concluded that any limitations in the law will likely be outweighed by the fact that it will guarantee them independent funding and provide them with a legal framework. The pros and cons of the new NGO law are examined in a later issue in this series. Notwithstanding its opposition to the law, the PCHR has been one of the leading advocates for independent NGOs.[7]

### **The Battle for International Public Opinion**

Sourani is aware that he is working in a fishbowl, and that the PCHR's every claim is carefully scrutinized. When we talked in February, he was ready to admit that the Palestinians were losing the fight for public opinion in Europe and North America.

This fight is about emotions and images rather than facts, and it was particularly brutal in the weeks before our visit. Israel's reputation had been severely damaged when young Mohammed Al Durra was shot and killed on camera in Gaza as he tried to find shelter behind his father.

But the impact of that horrible sequence was erased by the image of two dead Israeli reservist soldiers being dumped out of the Ramallah police station and one of the killers holding up bloodstained hands at the window. This confirmed the stereotype of Palestinians as brutal terrorists and made it easier for Israel to justify its harsh tactics. Sourani looked haggard and discouraged when we met him in his office. He complained bitterly of a 'conspiracy of silence' in Europe. 'Yes, we're sick, exhausted, and tired. We're also afraid that the worst is yet to come.'

Sourani's overriding goal is to get international protection for Palestinian civilians, and he has paid particular attention to the Fourth Geneva Convention, one goal of which is to protect noncombatants in war.

Israel has always maintained that its forces do not occupy the territories in a legal sense because they were not under sovereign powers prior to 1967. [8] Israel, however, has been alone in this opinion, and in February 1999, the United Nations took the exceptional step of calling for a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention (these are the governments that monitor implementation of the convention).

The meeting took place in Geneva on July 15, 1999, and it lasted less than 10 minutes. According to the PCHR, the United States warned that invoking the convention would complicate the Oslo peace process at a sensitive moment. (The Likud government had been voted out of power in Israel in May, and the new Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, announced his commitment to the peace process.) Some say that Arafat cancelled the Geneva meeting as a gesture of goodwill toward Barak. The arguments for a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention are even more pressing today than they were back in July 1999. During the month of March, Raji Sourani returned to Geneva for the annual session of the UN's Human Rights Commission, once again arguing for implementation of the convention.

Sourani also made the case that the best way for European governments to rescue the faltering

peace process and help Palestinian civil society was to press Israel to abide by the rule of law in its response to the current Palestinian uprising.

Sourani had plenty of evidence to back up his case, because the commission was already flooded with reports that criticized Israel. Armed with such evidence, Sourani urged the commission to call another special meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. His request was met with a limp response. Western governments were happy to use the commission to criticize governments like Sudan and Iraq, but they were worried about the possibility of a backlash at home if they came out too openly against Israel. As a result, they abstained on several key proposals.

Sourani was not around to witness this defeat, because he left Geneva at the news that Israel was shelling Gaza City, where he lives with his young family. He knew what was at stake and what had been rejected in Geneva.

### **On the Trail of Torture**

Fathi Sobh was a professor of education at Gaza's Al Azhar University when he fell afoul of the security forces of the Palestine Authority.

It all started on a mundane note last year, when Professor Sobh failed 13 students who did not attend his lectures. He was surprised and shaken when the university president reversed his decision for two of the students and gave them a passing grade.

These two young women were evidently very well connected, but Professor Sobh saw no reason to make an exception on their behalf. He dug in his heels and insisted on a meeting with the university president, who eventually backed down.

The incident continued to irritate the professor, who encouraged freethinking in his classes. As a result, he was quietly pleased when two of his students opted to write papers about corruption at the university and the Palestinian Authority. To drive home the point, the professor included corruption as a subject in his end of term exam.

This infuriated the university president, who wrote Sobh an angry letter. The professor barely had time to read the letter when officials from Palestinian security forces arrested him that same afternoon.

### **'Preventive Detention'**

Sobh was no stranger to detention -- the Israelis had previously arrested him -- and he assumed that this arrest was connected to his run-in previously with the university president, who is a member of the Palestinian Executive and close to President Yasser Arafat. But the interrogators showed little interest in his work at the university. 'They asked me whether I had spied for Mossad or the CIA or the KGB! They also accused me of being a homosexual and of having relations with other women.'

Sobh's treatment deteriorated quickly. One day they handcuffed him to a chair, the next they made him stand for an entire day with eyes blindfolded. He went on a hunger strike the first day. Within a month he lost 40 pounds.

He remembers July 23 of last year as a particularly bad day. He went into a faint that lasted for nine hours. They revived him with water and then used electricity on his tongue and legs until they were black. Then they put cream on his burns before delegates from the International Committee of the Red Cross visited him.

Three weeks passed before they began to ask him about the university. They told him that a confession would get him released, but he had nothing to confess. On August 10, they sent him to see the Palestinian Attorney General, whom he knew personally. The man promised to act, but Sobh was to remain in detention for another three months.

After the first dreadful month of 'preventive detention,' the conditions in jail eased, but Sobh was shocked when some of his own students were hired as jailers. They were appalled to find him in jail, and some even wept at his predicament. But there was no other work for them in Gaza.

Sobh suffered a serious injury to one eye during a beating, which caused him to lose consciousness for 30 hours. He was transferred to hospital, but they could not perform the operation so he was released and allowed to seek medical treatment abroad. Four governments offered to cover the cost, and he flew to Switzerland for treatment.

### **Leaving the Door Open to Torture**

It is hard to speak of a success, but in some ways the campaign against torture by Palestinian human rights groups has produced some notable results.

On the Palestinian side, no deaths were reported from torture in jails last year. This was a dramatic improvement over 1995 when there were 12 deaths reported. Dr. El Sarraj from the Gaza Community Health Programme, himself a prominent victim of torture, now gives human rights training to Palestinian police officers.

Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups have also drawn attention to the use of torture by Israeli security forces. On September 6, 1999, after a long campaign by human rights organizations, the Israeli High Court took the extraordinary step of outlawing the use of torture as a method of interrogation. Among the practices prohibited were shaking, sleep deprivation, the use of extremely loud music, extreme light on the face, and the frog stance.

One of those who went through such an ordeal, Hazem Al-Hosary, met with this delegation. Al-Hosary has vivid memories of the weeks he spent being interrogated by Israeli security officials in 1998. He was arrested while crossing into the West Bank from Jordan, where he was studying and taken to the Ashkelon jail. There he was interrogated about his activities during the first (1987) intifada and more specifically about his alleged membership in Hamas.

Al-Hosary was hooded and chained for 35 days to a stool. In total, he says, his interrogation

lasted for 55 days, during which time he was not allowed to meet with family members. He first saw a lawyer from the PCHR after three weeks. Finally he was moved into a jail. At this point, he says, his treatment improved dramatically. He was released after 19 months in jail.

The Israeli High Court reiterated the prohibition against torture at its session on September 6, 2000, but it has stopped short of an absolute ban and has even appeared to invite the Knesset to pass a new law authorizing the use of torture in interrogations in special circumstances. In other words, the issue for the Court was not so much that torture is a fundamental abuse under international law -- the position of most civilized governments -- as the fact that there was no law on the books in Israel to justify the use of torture.

This produced a worried reaction from the PCHR in Gaza. 'While the Court's decision represents a milestone in the battle against torture, the battle is not over. A lot of work is demanded from Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights organizations as well as the international community as a whole to ensure that the Israeli Knesset does not enact a law that empowers the GSS (Israeli General Security Service) to employ physical force against Palestinian prisoners even in exceptional circumstances. According to international law, torture is prohibited in all circumstances, without exceptions.'<sup>[9]</sup> The battle against torture and illegal detention in the Palestinian territories is also far from over. The Palestinian Authority released all political prisoners at the start of the current uprising, but when we talked to them in February, Raji Sourani and Eyad El Sarraj expressed concern that this could change abruptly. They were worried that the Palestinian prisoners had been freed partly to put pressure on Israel, and that Israel might demand a sweep against 'militants' as a condition for resuming negotiations.

Such a demand, says Raji Sourani, could lead to renewed abuses by the Authority and wash away the gains of recent years. The image of a repressive Authority would play into the hands of Israel and used to justify tougher measures against the Palestinians.

As of today this fear is beginning to look very real as Arafat comes under pressure by Israel to move against Hamas and the Islamic Jihad in return for Israel's acceptance of the U.S.-brokered ceasefire.

### **The Scars Remain**

Torture leaves deep scars on an individual and on a society. Yet it has had a dramatically different effect on the two torture victims interviewed by this delegation.

Hazem Al-Hosary shrugs off his experience in the Israeli prison. 'I forgot about it as soon as I left. They were the enemy, and I knew what to expect. Hundreds of us have gone through the same experience.' Today Al-Hosary teaches Islamic banking at the Islamic University in Gaza. Earlier this year he opened a shop. He seems content with his life.

Professor Fathi Sobh, in contrast, is still reliving the trauma of his arrest at the hands of Palestinian security officials and yearning for justice. Sobh has received a clean bill of health from the university, which conducted a long inquiry and ordered him reinstated. But the university president refuses to concede. Sobh rages inwardly against his university colleagues,

whom he considers cowards for having refused to stand up to the president on his behalf. He is ashamed to admit that he has taken out his anger on his children.

But what has depressed him most is the knowledge that he was tortured by fellow Palestinians. Some of his interrogators were formerly detained in an Israeli jail with him.

'I am still terrified,' he told us. 'Palestinians are my brothers, my friends, my family.'

### **Raji Sourani: 'There Can Be No Peace Without Justice'**

The following is taken from Raji Sourani's contribution to 'Speak Truth to Power,' the book of writings by prominent human rights defenders and winners of the Robert F. Kennedy Award for Human Rights.

'I believe deeply in the need for peace, but my own life taught me that there can be no peace, no justice, without human rights. Witnessing massive and violent human rights violations on a daily basis makes quite a mark on a young mind and heart. In my youth I saw many people killed, arrested, or beaten before my eyes -- including my brother, who was arrested in early 1968. He was in prison for three years. As a kid at school, I saw the army beat students for participating in demonstrations. Our daily life was really hell. My family is deeply rooted in this place -- I'm not, by definition, one of the many refugees in Gaza. But everybody felt like strangers in our homeland.

'Our lives were totally controlled by the occupation. When you are as young as I was and see all this happening, it leaves a strong impression. You begin to ask: What's going on? Why is this happening? Why are these unfair things happening? Why was our neighbor's house demolished? Why was my brother imprisoned? Of course anyone who feels and begins to understand what is going on wants a better future, a better life, and you want to express it in one way or another.

'For me the next stage came after my arrest and imprisonment. I saw the other side of the moon. All I had seen before did not prepare me for the hell I found myself in, even if I, as a lawyer, was treated to the 'VIP' hell. When you are being subjected to torture, you want to die ten times a day. And I saw how torture was being used systematically, even on kids as young as twelve.

'I thought: all these prisoners, their miserable conditions, the systematic torture and abuse, and nobody knows anything about it. And then I thought of the house demolitions, the land confiscations, the daily beatings. I said to myself: I'm a lawyer, can't somebody be a witness to these crimes? Can't we reduce the suffering even minimally, some way or another? I thought that surely it was possible, through sustained human rights work, to let the world know about the practices of the Israeli occupation, and in doing so to help these victims. So that is what I decided to do. And I've been doing it for 20 years now.

'I'll never forget one time after being released from administrative detention, having been detained simply because of my human rights work, the Israeli officer said to me, 'Raji, this is your last arrest, and I hope you know what that means.' It was a threat, but we believed in our work, in our struggle, in human rights. I hate to speak about our own suffering as human rights

activists. We have to be strong enough to make people feel, and know, that we can defend them. We have to be strong enough to take care of the real victims.

'I simply believe that human rights, democracy, and the rule of law are not luxuries. They are crucial necessities -- the oxygen of meaningful life. We see the violations on a daily basis. We see the victims, we know them, we live with them. What keeps us going is the belief that you can do something, even if it is just a little something. And even if we cannot improve the situation, at least we can stop it from deteriorating further.

'I believe we must continue to struggle to defend the rights of the victims, we must continue to reject all forms of human rights abuses. We must believe that it is worth it to make even small changes. For the sake of the victims of these abuses and injustices, we must carry out our work professionally. We must be vigorous in our defense of the persecuted and bold enough to never stop opposing their victimizers, no matter who they may be.

'I don't believe in violence, and I don't think it is a solution. Nor do I believe that Palestinians are the only ones whose blood is sacred. All human life is sacred, no matter which nationality, race, or religion. But we cannot accept the situation as it is. We must do something.

'I don't want to see more suffering. Whatever we do today may bear its fruits tomorrow. Like Martin Luther King Jr., we too have a dream -- a dream and a very legitimate agenda, to get rid of the occupation, to determine our own destiny, and to have an independent state -- a state where democracy, human rights, and the rule of law prevail. As I have said, the obstacles we are now facing are very complicated, much more so than pre-Oslo. But we are determined to go on with the struggle -- all the way.'

[1] The full text of Raji Sourani's contribution to 'Speak Truth to Power' can be found on the [web](#).

[2] PCHR, '1999 Annual Report of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, p. 73.

[3] Ibid., p. 149.

[4] Ibid., p. 11.

[5] Sourani in 'Speak Truth to Power.

[6] PCHR, '1999 Annual Report, p. 113.

[7] Ibid., p. 129.

[8] The Gaza Strip was administered by Egypt and the West Bank was under Jordanian control when they were seized and occupied by Israel in 1967. Israel maintains that neither government could claim sovereignty. This argument was rejected by the three-person UN Mission of Inquiry who visited the territories on behalf of the UN Human Rights Commission earlier this year. (UN reference: E/CN.4/2001/121, March 16, 2001)

[9] PCHR, '1999 Annual Report, p. 29.

- ***Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR): E-mail: [pchr@pchrgaza.org](mailto:pchr@pchrgaza.org). Tel. 972 - 8 -2824776.***