

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
1999		15	Palestinian Authority	Abdulsittar Qassem, historian, a.o.

*Announcement:*

The American Association for the Advancement of Science reports that several academics and government critics have been arrested in areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority on 28 November. Among them, Dr. Abdulsittar Qassem, professor of history at An Najah University. We hope that you are able to send the recommended appeal.

9 December 1999

**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION NETWORK (AAASHRAN)**

**PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY--ACADEMICS AND GOVERNMENT CRITICS ARRESTED**

CASE NUMBER: PA9915

**Issues:**

Right to liberty and security of the person; freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention; freedom of expression

**Facts of the case:**

In retaliation against individuals who signed a petition criticizing its actions and alleging corruption, on 28 November 1999, the Palestinian Authority initiated a campaign to arrest and harass them. Among the twenty who signed the petition are academics, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and former politicians. Palestinian authorities have already detained eleven of the signatories and, in what is presumably an effort to carry out their arrest, President of the Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat called for the lifting of parliamentary immunity from the other nine signatories, who are members of the

Palestinian Council. The individuals who have been detained include:

Dr. Ismat Shakhshi, professor of chemistry at An Najah University, summoned to the Nablus police station on 28 November for questioning. Although allowed to leave on US\$12,500 bail, she had to return for questioning the next morning;

Dr. Yaser Abusafiyya, physician from Nablus, detained by Palestinian police;

Dr. Abdulsittar Qassem, professor of history at An Najah University, arrested by Palestinian General Security Services in Nablus;

Dr. Abdulrahim Kittana, physician from Tulkarem, arrested by Palestinian General Security Services in Nablus;

Dr. Abdul Samara, writer and editor of Kan'an from Ramallah, detained by Palestinian police, and transferred to Jericho prison on 29 November to await the General Prosecutor of the State Security Courts;

Ahmad Katamesh, writer from Ramallah, detained by Palestinian police, and transferred to Jericho prison on 29 November to await the General Prosecutor of the State Security Courts;

Dr. Adnan Odeh, researcher for the Union of Parliamentary Researchers from Nablus, arrested by Palestinian police;

Dr. Afif Sulaiman, physician from Nablus, arrested by Palestinian police;

Ahmad Shaker Doobeen, school teacher from Hebron, arrested by Palestinian police;

Bassam Shaka'a, former mayor of Nablus, placed under house arrest; and

Waheed Alhamdallah, former mayor of Anabta, placed under house arrest.

The majority of the detainees have been held without charge or trial. Some were denied legal counsel, although they were later able to meet informally with lawyers.

Yasser Arafat called an urgent meeting of the Palestinian Legislative Council to request the removal of parliamentary immunity from nine of the signatories who are members of the Council. The Council avoided a confrontation by deciding not to vote on the question; the nine still face possible future arrest. The Council, however, voted to set up a committee to monitor Council members' behavior. Although the legislature voted to condemn the criticism of the Palestinian Authority, it asked that those who were arrested in connection with the petition be released, and officials also said that they have lifted the house arrest of the other two. After the Council meeting, one of the legislators who signed the petition was shot in the leg just outside of his home.

Yasser Arafat reportedly ordered the signatories to retract their statement and to apologize. The lawmakers refused, stating that it was a matter of principle, and that they were not seeking to create a

revolution, but to improve the management of institutions under the Palestinian Authority.

Human rights organizations have reported that the Palestinian Authority has harassed and arrested its critics, including journalists, human rights activists, and political commentators.

The arrest and harassment of the individuals who signed the petition constitutes a serious violation of international standards listed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They include:

liberty and security of the person (Article 3);  
freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention (Article 9); and  
freedom of expression (Article 19).

**Recommended action:**

Please send telexes, faxes, and letters:

Calling for the immediate release of all individuals held because of their legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression; and  
urging the Palestinian Authority to cease efforts to lift the immunity of members who exercise their right to free speech.

(Sources of information on this case include the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group; and the Washington Post.)

**Appeal and inquiry messages should be sent to:**

President Yasser Arafat  
Palestinian Authority  
Al-Muntada  
Gaza, Palestinian Authority  
Fax: 011 972 7 822365 (ask to send a fax)  
Telegram: President Arafat, Palestinian Authority, Gaza  
(Salutation: Dear President Arafat)

Please send copies of your appeals, and any responses you may receive, or direct any questions you may have to Elisa Munoz, AAAS Science and Human Rights Program, 1200 New York Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005; tel. 202-326-6797; email [EMUNOZ@AAAS.ORG](mailto:EMUNOZ@AAAS.ORG); or fax 202-289-4950.

The keys to effective appeals are to be courteous and respectful, accurate and precise, impartial in approach, and as specific as possible regarding the alleged violation and the international human rights standards and instruments that apply to the situation. Reference to your scientific organization and professional affiliation is always helpful.

To ensure that appeals are current and credible, please do not continue to write appeals on this case after 90 days from the date of the posting unless an update has been issued.