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REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE
ISRAELI PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS
OF THE POPULATION OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

SECURITY COUNCIL
Thirty-fourth year

Letter dated 12 February 1979 from the Permanent Representative of
Jordan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of February 1979, I wish on behalf of the Group, to enclose the article that appeared in The Washington Post of 7 February 1979 entitled "Allegations of Israeli Torture Contain Grisly Descriptions".

I shall appreciate very much the circulation of this letter and the enclosed article as a document of the General Assembly, under the item entitled "Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories", and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Hazem NUSEIBEH
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Article entitled "Allegations of Israeli Torture contain
Grisly Descriptions" appearing in The Washington Post of
7 February 1979

by

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Chicago, Feb. 6 -- Elias believes he understands just what the State Department means in the 1979 human rights report by "instances of mistreatment."

He says he learned all about it during a month of questioning, beating and torture by Israeli interrogators on the occupied West Bank.

Israeli insists that brutality by interrogators is forbidden by Israeli law and that and violations are punished. Elias disagrees.

The way he tells it, his education on the subject began when three Israeli security officers, backed up by armored cars and soldiers in the street, entered his family's house about 1:00 a.m. one day, tied his hands behind his back, threw him face down in the rear of a Land Rover and drove him off to prison.

It ended, he says, about 30 days later -- after a bottle was shoved up his anus twice; after he was twice hung naked in the "meat locker," his feet off the floor and his hands tied to steel hooks in the wall, while interrogators beat him on the back, legs and genitals or squeezed his testicles; after, finally, he broke and confessed to what the interrogators wanted, "Just to be able to stand my body."

"Man is only flesh and blood," he said in an interview here, then turned away his eyes with a short, nervous laugh. "I told them what they wanted."

Elias' treatment at the hands of Israeli interrogators is one of 29 such cases in Jerusalem and the occupied West Bank that make up the body of two classified cables from the United States consulate in Jerusalem reporting to the State Department the possibility that Arab political prisoners are brutalized as a systematic practice by Israeli security officers trying to extract confessions.

The reports constitute a new entry into the long controversy over Israeli conduct in the occupied territories. Arab charges of brutality -- and the Israeli denials -- have been part of the bitter Middle East debate since Israeli forces seized control of the territory from Jordan in the 1967 war.

But the two cables from Jerusalem -- the first last May, the second last November -- were the first official U.S. diplomatic reporting raising the possibility of systematic mistreatment.

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Israel always has been extremely sensitive to the charges, particularly in the light of the nation's genesis as a refuge for Jews fleeing the atrocities of Nazi Germany in World War II. A series by The London Sunday Times' insight team in 1977 charging that Palestinians were being tortured drew indignant denials from Israeli spokesmen, who charged the British reporters with violating journalist ethics.

Three Palestinians Sought Out

Elias is one of three Palestinians recently immigrated to the Chicago area who were sought out to provide independent confirmation of what was said about them in the diplomatic cables. Two of the three had served time after conviction of membership in Palestinian organizations forbidden by Israeli law, and the third served five weeks' administrative detention on similar charges. In separate lengthy conversations, they repeated the stories they had told U. S. consular officer Alexandra U. Johnson in Jerusalem, adding details as they were pressed for specifics, but insisting that the charges against them were untrue.

All are identified by nicknames or abbreviated versions of their names because of their fears that relatives still in Jerusalem or the West Bank could suffer reprisals.

Elias, 28, remembers getting a swift introduction to what lay before him hours after his arrival in April 1974 at the interrogation centre in Hebron, a West Bank town about 18 miles south of Jerusalem.

An Israeli interrogator, speaking fluent Arabic, began pummeling him on the chest and back, he said, then put a matchstick on the table and asked him what it was.

"I said, this is a matchstick," Elias recalled. "He said, 'No, it's a tank.' I said no, it was a match. But he hit me and said, 'No! It's a tank.'"

After a month of brutality and degradation, about half of it spent in a 3-by-6 foot steel isolation box, whose only opening was a Judas window in the door, Elias says, he was no longer insisting that the match was not a tank. He says that by then he was telling the interrogators whatever they wanted to hear: the matchstick was a tank. He belonged to an illegal Palestinian organization. He distributed brochures attacking Israel. He trained in the use of explosives.

Between his initial resistance and the ultimate breakdown, Elias says, came about 15 interrogation sessions during which he was beaten on the genitals, two in which the bottle was inserted, two in which he was dangled in the "meat locker," two hours the first time and about three the second, and one in which he was doused with cold water and left to shiver in the isolation box he and fellow prisoners called the "cage".

One session, he says, included a threat that Israeli security officers would bring his unmarried sister to the prison. Another included a one-day trip to a different interrogation centre, where he says he was thrown onto a floor covered with sharp protrusions that left his body in pain.

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A third was capped by his being enclosed in the cage with another prisoner who told him he had just returned from electric shock treatment.

"I held him on the bottom of the cage", Elias said, again laughing nervously. "He couldn't stop his legs from shuddering."

In Elias' view, the abuse he suffered was standard procedure for Palestinians arrested for political or terrorist activity against Israel's 12-year-old military occupation of the West Bank.

Two weeks of Interrogation

Abu Raad, a 22-year-old Jerusalemite, says he still suffers stomach pains, digestion trouble and cramps in his right leg because of what was done to him during two weeks of interrogation, most of it in room No. 6 at Jerusalem's Russian Compound, a former Russian Orthodox pilgrimage center used by the Israeli Government.

His ordeal, he says, began in April 1975 when Israeli security officers in civilian clothes beat on the doors and windows of his family home about 2:00 a.m., waking the dozen people who lived there, and led him away blindfolded after searching the house.

At the compound interrogation center -- "room No. 6 -- that is the worst" -- Abu Raad recalls that several interrogators began asking him about membership in Palestinian guerilla groups, arms possession and training, participation in terrorist operations such as attacks on Israeli patrols.

"They said some friends had accused me," he related in a conversation at the home of the brother with whom he lives since arriving in the United States. "He said take off your clothes. I took off my shirt. Not enough. I took off everything. So they spent some time mocking me. Then they began hitting me, and hitting me on the testicles."

That was the first of many such sessions, he said, sometimes at the rate of eight a day, and at other times once every few days.

His interrogators adopted Arab or American nicknames, he said: Abu Abd, who looked like an Iraqi; Abu Jamil, who looked like he may have been Moroccan, Johnny, a compact muscular European.

He remembers Abu Abd most, he says, for the time he pulled a rubber-covered steel cable about a foot long out of a drawer and beat him on the stomach until blood dripped out of his mouth. He remembers Abu Jamil most, he says, for reaching between his legs from behind and squeezing his testicles. Johnny and the others, he says, mostly just beat on his ears, temples and body with the heels of their hands while shouting "confess, confess."

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One interrogator, who had not been involved in previous grillings, said he needed a confession because "I want a star," Abu Raad said, while others stripped him, propped him against a wall in the frisk pose and beat his legs and genitals from behind with a stave until he fell to the ground, his right leg trembling uncontrollably.

"It was raining, I remember" he said. They took me outside to make me use my leg."

Files on the Whole Family

Questions also involved activities and whereabouts of family and friends. "They establish files on the whole family," said Abu Raad, whose brother also has been imprisoned. "They ask who's your brother, who's your sister. They write down your whole life."

Treatment improved for the second two weeks of his interrogation, Abu Raad said. By that time he had confessed to membership in Fatah, the largest guerilla group in Yasser Arafat's Beirut-based Palestine Liberation Organization.

"I was finished," he said.

Samih, a 1973 graduate of the American University of Beirut, also got to know Abu Abd, Johnny and Abu Jamil. He was arrested in April 1976 and taken to the Russian Compound for interrogation on charges that he belonged to the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist-oriented guerilla group headed by Nayef Hawatmeh.

On nine of the 12 days he was actively interrogated, Samih said, he was beaten on the ears and temples, or kicked in the genitals or beaten on the head with the rubber-covered steel cable. On one occasion, he said, he was made to stand on one leg holding a chair for what he remembers as about 45 minutes.

Samih said his interrogators told him they knew he belonged to the Democratic Front because they had a photograph of him entering the group's Beirut headquarters. In addition, he recalled, they told him his name was on a list of Democratic Front members discovered when Israeli commands attacked the Beirut homes of several Palestinian leaders in 1974.

Unlike the other two, Samih did not confess. He was held five weeks in administrative detention after his month of interrogation. Elias was sentenced to nine months in prison and five years probation. Abu Raad was sentenced to a year and a half in prison.
