

חיילים נעצרו בחדש להחשד ללוח בפלשתינים



החדש: היכו פלשתינים במחסום ודרשו מה
המעצר הראשון מסוגו מאז תחילת אי

**In Broad Daylight
Abuse of Palestinians
by IDF soldiers
on 23 July 2001**

בצלם

B'TSELEM

The Israeli Information Center for
Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

בצלם

מרכז המידע הישראלי לזכויות האדם בשטחים (א.ר.)

רחוב התעשייה 8 (קומה רביעית) ירושלים 93420

טלפון: 02-6735599 פקס: 02-6749111

B'TSELEM - The Israeli Information Center for
Human Rights in the Occupied Territories

8 Hata'asiya St. (4th Floor) Talpiot, Jerusalem 93420

Tel. 02-6735599 Fax. 02-6749111

بتسيلم - مركز المعلومات الإسرائيلي لحقوق الإنسان في الأراضي المحتلة
شارع هتاسيا 8 (الطابق الرابع) تلبيت القدس 93420. هاتف 6735599 (02) فاكس 6749111 (02)

E-mail: mail@btselem.org

<http://www.btselem.org>

ISSN 0793-4580



In Broad Daylight

Abuse of Palestinians by IDF soldiers on 23 July 2001

Written by Yael Stein

Data coordination by Nimrod Amzalak and Korin Degani

Fieldwork by Musa Abu Hashhash and Raslan Mahagna

Translated by Maya Johnston

Edited by Jessica Montell

Cover: "Soldiers Arrested on Suspicion of Abusing Palestinians," *Yediot Aharonot*, 1 August 2001

Introduction

This report details a case of severe abuse of Palestinian residents of As Samu' Village, Hebron District, by Israeli soldiers. According to testimonies given to B'Tselem, twelve Israeli soldiers detained two Palestinian taxis. After ordering three women, a child, and an elderly man to leave the area, the soldiers proceeded to abuse the other nine Palestinians over a period of two hours.

On Monday, 23 July 2001, around noon, soldiers from the Shimshon Battalion, permanently stationed in the West Bank, stopped a Palestinian taxi on the As Samu'-Hebron road, near the village of Karma. The soldiers, who had been riding in two jeeps, forcibly removed the taxi driver and three passengers from the vehicle while yelling at and beating them. The soldiers then took the Palestinians' identity cards.

One soldier took Muhammad Sufia, one of the passengers, behind a parked army jeep and beat his head and left ear with his helmet and rifle butt. Fifteen minutes later, another soldier beat him over the head with a metal object. Sufia lost consciousness as a result of the blows. Another passenger, Mahmud Hawamdeh, was beaten by the soldiers as soon as he got out of the taxi. The soldiers ordered Khaled Rawashdeh, the taxi driver, at gunpoint to drive his taxi into a rock-strewn clearing in an olive grove. The soldiers ordered an elderly man who had been in the taxi to leave the site.

At that point, an additional army jeep arrived at the scene. The soldiers from this jeep stopped another passing taxi. Shouting and using physical force, the soldiers ordered the passengers to get out of the taxi and give them their identity cards. They ordered the driver, Muhammad a-Salamin, to drive his taxi into the same rock-strewn clearing in the olive grove. The soldiers ordered all the passengers to get out of the vehicle. In coarse language, they told the three women and the little girl who had been in the taxi

to leave. They ordered the five male passengers and the driver to stand, along with the three Palestinians from the other taxi, near the wall of a storage facility in the olive grove.

After lining nine Palestinians up against the wall, the soldiers began to beat them severely, in part with their rifle butts and with their helmets. Some of the soldiers smashed the windows and slashed the seat covers and tires of the two taxis.

The soldiers ordered the Palestinians to beat each other in pairs and threatened to kill them if they refused. When the blows the Palestinians inflicted on one another were too gentle for the soldiers' liking, they compelled the Palestinians to use more force. At one point, the soldiers made Khaled Rawashdeh, the taxi driver, beat the other eight men as a condition for their release.

Following two hours of abuse, the soldiers finally let the Palestinians leave, throwing stones at them as they left. Four of the Palestinians, including the two taxi drivers, were taken by residents of Karma, a village near to where the incident occurred, for medical treatment.

On Friday [27 July], B'Tselem researcher Musa Hashhash drove to Karma on work-related matters. While there, he noticed a few soldiers approaching his car, which he had parked outside the village. He noted that the jeep they were driving had the same license plate number given by Muhammad a-Salamin in his testimony. He thought these might be the soldiers who had abused the nine Palestinians on the previous Monday. He spoke with them at length, mentioning the event described in this report. In response, one of the soldiers said, "they deserved it" because they knew it was forbidden to drive on the closed road.

The testimonies of four of the Palestinians abused by the soldiers follow.

Testimonies

Testimony of Khaled Mershed Hassan Rawashdeh, 36, resident of As Samu'/ Hebron District, married, taxi driver¹

I have been a taxi driver for two years now. I travel every day from As Samu', where I live, to Hebron, a twenty-three-kilometer drive. During the last month, because the direct road from As Samu' to Hebron was often blocked with piles of earth, I can only take passengers part of the way.

On Monday [23 July] at about 10:00 A.M., Israeli bulldozers removed the earth roadblocks at the entrances to Dura and Fawwar, and all the taxi drivers from As Samu' started to use this part of the road again. That morning, I drove from Hebron to As Samu' and returned to Hebron at about noon. I had three passengers in the taxi: Ahmad Suleiman Rawashdeh, 65, Muhammad Khalil Abu Seif, 21, and Mahmud Muhammad Hawamdeh, 22, all residents of As Samu'. I had driven for about eight kilometers on the main road and was near Karma, a small village, when I passed an army jeep parked on the road. Four soldiers were standing alongside it. I had only gone fifty meters past them when one of the soldiers near the jeep whistled and signaled me to stop. At first I considered ignoring him, but I saw another jeep four hundred meters ahead, so I stopped and drove back to the first jeep.

When I stopped near the jeep, one of the soldiers came up to us and took my identity card and those of the passengers and told me to get out of the car. Another soldier got into the taxi and opened the glove compartment. He threw the documents, the cassettes, and the money that were inside the glove compartment onto the floor.

Meanwhile, the jeep that was parked down the road drove over and four more soldiers joined the first four. Six of the soldiers began to severely beat two of the passengers, the two younger ones. The two men fell to the ground and the soldiers continued kicking them and beating them with the butts of their rifles. This lasted for about ten minutes.

Then the soldiers told me to drive into an olive grove on the right side of the road. An eighty or ninety-centimeter stone wall separated the road from the grove. I told the soldiers that the wall was blocking my way. One of them replied, "Either you drive or you'll be the Hebron martyr of the day." I tried to drive slowly, but the soldier told me to go back and drive quickly. I had to do it, and when I hit the wall, part of it got stuck to the taxi as I drove onto the land. With great difficulty, I stopped the taxi among the trees, and one of the soldiers told me to get out of the car.

The soldier got into the driver's seat and started to drive over the stones that had been dislodged from the wall, and to drive into the trees. He did that for about ten minutes, which damaged my taxi greatly.

Then he got out and told me to drive the car over the stone wall. I refused, so he offered me a dagger and told me to slash the four tires of the car. I refused, and told him that he could do it himself. I went to the window of the car, switched the engine off, and put the keys in my pocket. The soldier slashed two of the tires. Then he saw another taxi coming from the direction of Hebron. The other soldiers were beating the two younger passengers. The old passenger was given his identity card and told to leave the site quickly. At that point, four more soldiers came in a third jeep and stopped the other taxi. The soldier who

1. The testimony was given to Musa Abu Hashhash at the witness's home on 25 July 2001.

had slashed two of the tires came back to my taxi and slashed the two remaining tires.

From my position near my car, I recognized the driver of the coming taxi. He was Muhammad Yusuf Muhammad Salamin, 28, from As Samu'. The soldiers ordered the passengers to get out of the car. There were three women and five men in his taxi. The soldiers sent the women on their way, calling after them, "Get out of here, sluts." Just like they did with me, they ordered the taxi driver to drive along the separating wall and into the olive grove where I was. He refused at first, but one of the soldiers put his rifle to Muhammad's head and forced him to drive. One of the soldiers got in and crashed the taxi into the trees several times, just like they did to my taxi.

Then they told the passengers to stand by the wall and started to beat them. After that, they went up to the driver Muhammad and took some money from him. Then the soldiers told him to stand with the passengers, and they beat and shoved him as he walked over to the wall.

Now we were nine men standing in a line, with the soldiers continuing to beat us. It was as if they were playing a game. One of the soldiers, who was a distance away, ran at us and kicked one of the men in the stomach. They kicked us and beat us with their hands and rifle butts. This lasted for about twenty minutes.

The passengers were very tired and could barely stand on their feet. The soldiers, who also seemed tired, divided themselves into two groups of six each. One group went to the two taxis and started to damage them. First they tried to break the windows with small stones. When the glass didn't break, one of the soldiers suggested using bigger stones. They did, and broke the windshield, the left-side window, and the mirror. The soldiers also slashed the ceiling upholstery and the seats. Muhammad's taxi sustained even more damage. The soldiers broke his wireless radio and tape player. The soldiers told him to go ask Arafat to buy him a new radio.

The other group of soldiers came up to us. One of them struck me with the handle of his dagger under my right eye. He broke an armrest from the taxi and smashed my head with it. The soldiers ordered us to arrange ourselves in pairs and for each pair to beat each other. They said that they would shoot anyone who didn't do it and that whoever wanted to be a martyr just had to refuse. At first, we tried to be gentle, but, if we were gentle, the soldiers beat us until we started using force. This lasted for around ten minutes.

They told one of the men, 'Abd al-Muttaleb Muhammad Musleh Mahariq, 21, to beat us one by one. He refused, but one of the soldiers threatened to kill him. The other passengers told him [Mahariq] that it would be better if he beat them. With tears in his eyes, he punched us in the face and head. At first he beat us gently, but one of the soldiers aimed his rifle at his head and told him to beat us seriously. They told him to beat me in particular. He punched me six or seven times in the face.

The soldiers themselves beat us for around five minutes. Two of us almost collapsed: Muhammad Abu Seif, whose left ear had begun to bleed, and another man, who almost lost consciousness and fell several times. I tried to help these two and took them into the shade of an olive tree. One of the soldiers saw this, ran over to me, and struck me in the shoulder with his rifle. He asked if I sympathized with them. I replied that I didn't see why not because they were my passengers and I was responsible for them. He told me I could help them to leave the site and get back their identity cards if I beat them one by one.

I refused. Then he told me and two others, 'Abd al-Muttaleb and Muhammad Rawashdeh, to get out of the line. He said that if we didn't want to be martyrs or a news flash on *Al-Jazira* Television, we should start beating the others.

The other passengers asked me to do as the soldier instructed. I hesitated, and tears came to my eyes. The passengers begged

me to do it, and at last I agreed. The soldier then brought one of the passengers and demanded that I beat him in the face. He told the others to come closer and watch. I tried to beat him gently, but the soldier noticed and showed me how I should do it. The man standing before me encouraged me to do as I was told. So I did it to him and to the others. I beat them on different parts of their bodies according to the soldier's instructions. The last one whom I beat was 'Abd al-Muttaleb. I struck him in the mouth. When I finished, the soldier told me to beat myself for showing sympathy for the passengers. I replied that I truly deserve it and I beat myself on my mouth as hard as I could, out of helplessness and despair.

About two hours after stopping us, the soldiers gave us back our identity cards and told us to run away fast. They added that they wanted us to feel how painful the stones that strike soldiers were. When we turned to leave, the soldiers began to stone us. Some of the stones hit our backs and legs.

When we were ten to fifteen meters away, two passengers who were wounded, Abu Seif and Al-Hawamdeh, were put into cars of residents from the nearby village of Karma and taken to Ibn Seina Clinic, in As Samu'. The other passengers dispersed quickly. Muhammad Yusuf a-Salamin and I hid behind a wall and watched our cars. Muhammad called the Palestinian police in As Samu', who advised us to stay there until they handled the problem. About thirty to forty-five minutes later, an ambulance came and took us to 'Alia Hospital, in Hebron. I found out that the two who had been evacuated earlier were taken to Al-Ahli Hospital.

At about five o'clock in the afternoon, Muhammad and I went back to the place of the incident to take care of our taxis. Soldiers and a police car were at the site. We approached, but the soldiers started chasing us. We finally managed to speak

to the police officers, but they refused to help us. After the army and the police left, several children from the village helped us and we managed to change the tires and drive home. We got home at about 8:00 P.M.

Testimony of Muhammad Yusuf Muhammad a-Salamin, 28, resident of As Samu'/ Hebron District, married with three children, taxi driver²

I am married and have with three sons. The eldest is six and a half, the second is four and a half, and the youngest is two. I own a taxi that is a 2000 Ford transit. I started working as a taxi driver in 1998. I work the As Samu' - Hebron route. My workday begins at 6:30 A.M. and ends at around 5:30-6:00 P.M.

On 23 July 2001, I left the house at 6:30 in the morning. As usual, I drove passengers to al- Fawwar Refugee Camp. By 10:30, I had made three trips to the camp. At 10:30, an army bulldozer opened the entrance to the refugee camp, and I was told that the entrance to As Samu' had also been opened. I left al-Fawwar for As Samu' without passengers, using the bypass road. I arrived in As Samu' at 10:45. I immediately picked up passengers and drove toward Hebron on the bypass road. On the way to Hebron, I saw soldiers at various places along the bypass road, but no one stopped me. I arrived in Hebron at around 11:15. At the central station, I saw that there was a long queue of taxis waiting for passengers, so I decided to go back to As Samu' and pick up passengers along the way. Nine passengers got into the taxi - three women, one of them with a little girl, and five young men.

Around noon, I drove by Karma, near the UNRWA school. I didn't see any army jeeps. Suddenly, about twenty meters past the school, several soldiers jumped out of the

2. The testimony was given to Raslan Mahagna on 26 July 2001 at the witness's home.

olive groves into the middle of the road and ordered me to stop. I stopped immediately. One of the soldiers came toward the taxi and the others aimed their weapons at me. They were about thirty meters away. The soldier came to the window on my side, kicked the door, and crassly asked for my identity card. I gave my identity card to him and he put it into his shirt pocket without even looking at it. He ordered me to proceed. I proceeded slowly, and then a soldier came out from among the olive trees and ordered me to go into the grove.

I looked in the direction the soldiers told me to go and told the soldier that I couldn't take the taxi that way because it was full of rocks. He hit the side mirror with his rifle butt. The mirror is very expensive. He broke it and shouted at me to enter along the way they told me. I felt that, if I disobeyed his orders, I would pay with my life. I started moving back and forth trying to get onto the path. I had no choice, and I forced the taxi into the place that they told me. The taxi hit the rocks and sustained severe damage. The exhaust pipe dislodged and fell off, the power steering and the gearshift were destroyed, and the back bumper came off. The sides of the vehicle got dented. While I was trying to enter [the grove], I saw the taxi of Khaled Rawashdeh, whom I know from the village, parked inside. After a few attempts, I managed to get the vehicle to the place they told me. The whole time I was trying to drive where they told me, the soldier was shouting and banging his rifle on the side of the car and telling me to drive faster. I got in and parked behind Khaled's taxi.

Before I managed to switch the engine off, a soldier arrived, opened the door, grabbed me by the neck, and dragged me out. I fell on the ground face down. One of the soldiers stepped on my neck and another on my back. A third soldier arrived and told the other two to move. I understand Hebrew, so I understood what he said. The two soldiers moved, and I took advantage of it. I got up, went to the taxi, switched the engine off, took the keys, and put them in

my pocket. They tried to take the keys out of my pocket. I took them out and threw them far away. The soldiers took NIS 1000 in bills out of my pocket. I also had a cash box in the cab. The soldiers took it apart and took all the money in it - about NIS 250 in coins.

I was afraid that they were going to hit me, so I bent my head and put my hands on the back of my neck. The soldiers started punching me in the abdomen and back. They told me to take my hands off my head, but I refused. One of the soldiers handed me a dagger and ordered me to take it to the taxi and slash the tires. I refused, and then heard the air coming out of the tires. The soldiers ordered me to kneel. I put my head between my knees, and covered my head with my hands, as I was afraid I would get hit on the head. I heard them calling the soldier who held the dagger and telling him that I had a spare tire in the taxi. The soldier went back to the taxi and slashed the spare tire as well. I heard the air come out of that one too.

One of the soldiers caught me by the neck and pulled me up. I tried to turn around and see his face, and then he slapped me hard and ordered me to walk without looking left or right. Some twenty meters away, I saw Khaled and other people standing near a wall of storage sheds belonging to Karma's residents. I walked in the direction I was told, and while I was walking, the soldiers kicked me and punched me all over my body. I stood by the men who were standing near the wall. The soldier ordered me to lift my hands up, spread my legs, and stand with my face to the wall. I heard them swearing in Hebrew - words that are difficult for me to repeat. They went and thoroughly searched the taxis and broke the windshield. One of the soldiers grabbed me by the hair, turned my head around, and said, "Look at your vehicle, pretty isn't it? If we broke the rear window it would look even better." Then, with great force, he pushed my head toward his chest. My head hit his bulletproof vest. He then told me to go back and stand facing the wall.

While searching the taxi, they found the newspaper *Al Ayyam*. One of the soldiers started reading and translating to the other soldiers. He said to them, "Look what these people write about us." I heard the soldiers coming toward me, and then they started beating us. I didn't see how many of them beat us, because I was facing the wall. I just heard the others' screams. I was also crying and screaming the whole time. One of the soldiers turned my head around and asked me in Hebrew: "What brought you here? You know this is Israeli territory." I told him that I wasn't in Tel-Aviv or Jerusalem. I was around Hebron. Then, wearing his helmet, he butted me in the head. He walked off, and three soldiers came over and started kicking and punching me all over my body. They ordered me to kneel, facing the wall. I put my head between my knees. They hit the fellow next to me and he fell down. While falling, he pushed me, and I also fell. I got up and tried to look at the soldiers. One of them jumped up and gave me a karate kick in the stomach. I fell on my back. The soldier came over to me and pulled me by the hair. He stood me by the wall. Another soldier went to my cab and took apart the two-way radio. He asked me why I had such an instrument. I told him every driver in my station had one in their taxi. He said, "The Motorola isn't yours. Get Arafat to get you equipment."

They made me stand facing the wall again, and I could feel stones being thrown at us. Three stones hit my shoulder and two hit my back. One of the soldiers caught me by the hair and dragged me toward my taxi. "Look at your car," he said, and then he had me stand facing the wall again. Khaled was standing beside me. The soldiers dragged him back and one of them told him, "If you want us to release all of you, you'll have to punch everybody." That soldier told all of us to hit each other. They told us where on the body to hit. One soldier brought one of the men, Muhammad 'Ali Mehariq, and told me to slap him. I covered my face with my hands and refused. The soldier struck my face. Another soldier came over and

put his weapon on my shoulder, pointed at Muhammad's head. He told me to take my hands off my face; or else the next news item on *Al Jazira* TV would be about Muhammad's death. So I uncovered my face and Muhammad slapped me. This didn't satisfy the soldier and he ordered him to slap me harder. I told Muhammad to hit me hard and not get upset. With tears in his eyes he slapped me hard. This satisfied the soldiers. They brought another person from our town, 'Abd al-Muttaleb Muhammad Mehariq. They ordered him to punch me in the eye. He hesitated, and I told him not to get upset and to punch me hard. He punched me hard in the face and immediately started to cry. I think it was because of the anger, not the pain he suffered from the beating.

After that, the soldiers ordered Khaled, at gunpoint, to punch us all in the head. The soldiers ordered us to face the wall, and I covered my head with my hands. Khaled came to me with a soldier. I didn't see them. The soldier ordered me to take my hands off my head. He threatened that if I didn't, Khaled would die. I hesitated at first, and then I heard the sound of the trigger being cocked. I was afraid and took my hands off. I told Khaled not to hesitate and beat me. After he hit me, I fell down due to the exhaustion from the beatings. Then I heard them tell us to leave the place. About two hours had passed since they stopped us.

Two jeeps left, and four soldiers remained. One of them grabbed my head and turned me around. Another tried to open my right palm and put the dagger in it, but I refused and closed my palms tight. They beat me severely on the head and the rest of my body for two, three minutes. After that, they put the identity cards in Khaled's pocket, ordered us to look the other way, toward Karma, and started throwing stones at us. We all started running up the hill. I ran away toward the storage sheds. From there, I could see the jeep's license plate. I will never forget the number - 610010s. I remained lying behind the storage sheds to rest from everything I'd been through.

After about fifteen minutes, I called by my mobile phone the Palestinian police station in As Samu', and they sent us an ambulance, which arrived forty-five minutes later. They put Khaled and me into the ambulance. At that point, I lost consciousness and woke up only in the emergency room at 'Alia Hospital, in Hebron. At about 5:30 P.M., we were released, and Khaled and I went back to where our taxis had been left. We saw soldiers and a police jeep. We waited for a while for the soldiers to leave, but when we saw the police jeep, we decided to approach. It was around seven o'clock. The soldiers didn't let us get close, but finally I spoke to one of the police officers and told him what the soldiers had done to us. He told me it wasn't his business. I then told him that the soldiers had stolen my money, the tape deck I had in the car, and my Motorola two-way radio. The policeman gave me a phone number, 9969444, and told me to call that number. When I called, I found out that it was the Kiryat Arba police station. I told them everything that had happened to us, and about the things the soldiers had stolen. They told me to go there the next morning. When I went home, I discussed it with friends and family, and they advised me not to go because I might be arrested for fines I hadn't paid.

I can definitely identify one of the soldiers. I could pick him out of a thousand soldiers. He was about a meter and eighty centimeters tall. He had fair hair and skin. He wore silver sunglasses, and a light-cream-colored bulletproof vest, which was different from the others. The vest had writing on it, which I couldn't read.

The damage to my taxi is about NIS 20,000.

Testimony of Mahmud Muhammad Hawamdeh (Tfeha), 21, resident of Samoa/Hebron District, single, student³

I am a student at Hebron University, studying Arab culture. I live with my parents and fourteen siblings, and go to the university every morning and return in the afternoon.

In the past, soldiers never beat me, they just detained me at roadblocks to check my identity card. I have never been arrested or tried. I am active in the Fatah student organization at the university.

On 23 July 2001, I left my house at 11:20 A.M. and headed toward the taxi stand. I was going to the university in Hebron. I got into a Volkswagen taxi, whose driver, Khaled Murshid, I know. I usually ride with him. There were two other passengers in the taxi, one old and the other young. I noticed that the driver intended to go through As Samu's main entrance, which, to the best of my knowledge, has been closed off since October 2000. For that reason, we normally drove via Yatta and Dura to Hebron. I asked the driver, and he told me that the road was opened at ten o'clock that morning, and that he had already driven on it to Hebron and back that day. We drove along the Hebron-Beersheva bypass road until we got close to the entrance to Karma, some eight kilometers from As Samu'. I noticed that only trucks were on the road, and I did not see any Palestinian passenger cars. I was sure that the road was safe because the driver had told me that he had driven the road that same morning. I also knew that this route takes thirty minutes less than the other one.

When we approached Karma, I noticed a jeep heading toward us. It entered Karma and stopped on the side of the road. The taxi driver slowed down. A few meters after we passed the entrance to Karma, I told

3. The testimony was given to Raslan Mahagna on 26 July 2001 at the witness's home.

the driver to stop. He was looking in the rear-view mirror at what was happening behind him. The taxi was going slowly, and then a soldier jumped out of the back of the jeep and I heard him shout. I didn't understand what he was saying, but I saw his weapon aimed at us.

Between eight and ten soldiers were standing around the cab. One of them came to the side where I was sitting, next to the driver, grabbed my shirt through the window, opened the door and dragged me outside. He yelled at me to hand over my identity card. I gave it to him, and he gave me a powerful slap. I felt pain in my left ear. He asked me where I was from, and I responded that I was from As Samu'. He slapped me again, on the other cheek. In the meantime, the rest of the passengers got out of the taxi, and the soldiers began searching the vehicle. The soldier who had slapped me backed away about one meter. Then another soldier arrived, dancing and singing mockingly. I couldn't understand what he was saying. He approached me and gave me two slaps simultaneously, using both hands. I started to cry and shout and beg them to leave me alone. I noticed two soldiers taking the other young fellow behind the jeep and beating him.

The soldier who had slapped me came up and hit me on the chest with his rifle butt and ordered me to sit by the wall near the road. Not a minute passed before five soldiers came running and signaled "Why did you sit down?" to me. I motioned to them that the other soldier had told me to do so. When I got up to follow their orders, they started to kick me and hit me with their fists and rifle butts. They beat me all over my body. I fell on the ground, and they kept beating me for three or four minutes.

Another taxi, a Ford transit, arrived. It was going from Hebron to As Samu'. The soldiers left me, stopped the other taxi, and went to it. One of the soldiers took me to the jeep. My leg hurt and I had trouble walking, so he dragged me. He sat me down inside the jeep, facing another soldier. A soldier

who was standing near the back of the jeep took out a twenty-five-centimeter-long knife and put it to my neck. He talked and laughed, but I didn't understand what he was saying. I was in the jeep for five minutes, and then I saw the second taxi going toward the olive grove and driving over the rocks. Our taxi was there as well. I don't know how it got there. The soldiers had the passengers from the other cab get out. There were three women and several young men. They let the women go and lined the men up facing the wall. The distance between the jeep in which I was sitting and the wall was about fifteen meters. I could see what was going on through the back door of the jeep.

One of the soldiers signaled the soldier who was sitting facing me in the jeep, and ordered him to bring me over to the olive grove. He took me out of the jeep and ordered me to walk toward the soldier who had signaled him. I walked a few meters and stood there. I didn't know what to do. The soldier told the other soldiers to bring me to him. They yelled at me to go to him quickly. I reached him and then he and another soldier started beating me with their hands. They slapped and punched me. I put my hand on my head and lowered my head to my chest. They kept hitting me on the face, chest, and stomach. I was screaming with pain the whole time. I remained standing, and they beat me for close to a minute. One of the soldiers grabbed me by the hair from behind, and forced me next to the wall. Because my hands were on my head, my hand struck the wall. I stood along the wall with the rest of them. I was the first on the right. One soldier punched each of us in the face, and another kicked the leg of each one of us. I also got struck three times on my back with a rifle butt. One of the soldiers pulled my hair hard and ordered me to beat the man who was standing next to me. I hesitated at first. But the soldier started hitting me on the head and shouting at me to hit the fellow. I punched him three times. They then turned to that fellow and told him to hit me back. He hit me twice. The blows were strong, because the soldiers

ordered him to hit hard. One soldier grabbed my head and the head of the fellow standing next to me and slammed them together. The soldiers also did this to the rest of the men who were there.

The soldiers then backed up about two meters and started throwing stones at us. They threw about five stones and told us in Arabic that they wanted to show us how much stones hurt. The stones didn't hit me, but they hit the others. One of the soldiers took Khaled, the taxi driver, and told him that if he punched all of us they would let him go home. Khaled hesitated at first, and then a soldier punched him. Khaled punched me in the head, and then hit the others. Once he finished beating everyone, the soldiers shouted at us to leave. As we were leaving, one of the soldiers threw a stone at me that hit the back of my head. The soldier who threw the stone was a meter and a half away from me. I could feel my head bleeding as a result of the blow.

We ran up [the hill] toward Karma. Some of the village residents were waiting for us on the hill. They put iodine on my wound and bandaged it. An ambulance from Hebron took two of the wounded - the two taxi drivers. I was taken in a local Ford van to the clinic in Yatta. I was treated at the clinic for about an hour and a half, and then I was taken home. I showered and stayed home for about an hour. I felt strong pain in my back, legs, head, jaw, and ears. My brothers took me to 'Alia Hospital, in Hebron. I received treatment there for about two hours. I was told that if the pain recurred, I should return for further treatment. I still feel severe pain in the back of my head, ears, left jaw, back, legs, and left shoulder.

The soldiers threw away my identity card at the site of the incident. Khaled, the driver, returned it to me late that evening.

I filed a complaint with the security personnel of 'Alia Hospital and with the As Samu' police.

Testimony of Muhammad Khalil Suleiman Sufia (Abu Seif), 21, resident of As Samu'/Hebron District, single, laborer⁴

I live in As Samu' with my family - my parents and eight siblings. Before the al-Aqsa *intifada*, I worked as a construction worker inside Israel - in Beersheva and Kiryat Gat. When the *intifada* started, we stopped working because of the closure and the siege.

The main entrance road into As Samu' has been blocked with dirt piles and concrete blocks since the beginning of the *intifada*, last October. The main exit road leads to the Hebron-Beersheva bypass road, passing the Otniel settlement on the way. Because the main exit road has also been blocked off, we have had to use a makeshift road to get from the village to Hebron or to the nearby villages and towns. We go through Yatta, then a-Rihiya, al Fawwar, and from there to Hebron.

On Monday [23 July], I wanted to go to Hebron. At the taxi stand, I was told that the main exit road from the village had been opened and that cars could use it and get to Hebron via the bypass road. I got into a Volkswagen van with two other passengers. The driver was Khaled Mershed. One of the passengers was Ahmad Suleiman. I do not know the name of the third passenger, but he is a member of the Tfeha family.

We left As Samu' at about 11:00 A.M. I sat in the seat behind the driver. The young fellow from the Tfeha family sat beside the driver. When we were near Karma, we noticed a jeep standing by the side of the road. Another jeep was driving toward us. After driving a few meters passed the parked jeep, the driver saw in his rear-view mirror that a soldier had jumped off the jeep, pointed his weapon at us, and called us to stop.

4. The testimony was given to Raslan Mahagna on 26 July 2001 at the witness's home.

The other jeep passed us and stopped beside the parked jeep. A few soldiers, I don't know the exact number, but more than five, got out of the two jeeps. One soldier told the taxi driver to switch the engine off. He took everyone's identity card and ordered us to get out of the vehicle. We got out of the taxi and stood next to it. Some of the soldiers started searching the taxi. With his rifle butt, one of the soldiers struck the taxi's hood, lights, and windshield.

About five soldiers were near us. One of them signaled with his hand for one of us to go to him. The young man standing intended to go to him, but the soldier shouted in fluent Arabic that he meant that I should come. I approached the soldier. He grabbed my shirt and said, "Come, you Hamas, you Fatah." The soldier dragged me behind the jeep which was standing behind the taxi and started beating me while swearing and yelling in Arabic. He hit me on the head and left ear with the rifle butt. He took a metal helmet from the jeep and used it to hit me on my left ear. I was crying and screaming while he beat me. I felt blood flowing from my ear. My vision blurred and I felt severe pain in my ears and eyes.

After being beaten for, I estimate, fifteen minutes, another soldier came. He told the soldier who had been beaten me, "Leave him alone. I'll show you how to give a beating." He took a metal object from a box that was in the jeep. I could not tell what it was. He hit me with it on the left side of my head, near the ear. I fell, and must have lost consciousness, because I don't remember what happened afterwards. I didn't wake up until nine o'clock the next morning at al-Ahali Hospital, in Hebron.

After I woke up, I was told that residents [from Karma] carried me to one of the houses, where they poured water over my head. They summoned an ambulance but were told that none were available in Hebron, so they put me in a Volkswagen vehicle. At the entrance to As Samu', they called my cousin, who took me to the clinic in As Samu'. After that I was transferred by ambulance to the hospital in Hebron, where I remained for three days.

I got my identity card, which the soldiers had taken, from the Palestinian DCO. I haven't filed a complaint yet, but I intend to do so. I can identify with certainty the soldiers who beat me.

Conclusions

The case presented in this report is particularly grave and is reminiscent of the severe cases of abuse that were uncovered during the previous *intifada*. However, the use of violence by security forces against Palestinians has accompanied the occupation for many years, and beatings and abuse by members of the security forces have become part of the daily routine of Palestinian residents of the Occupied Territories. Although in most cases the abuse is given in a "small dose," such as slaps, kicks, insults, unnecessary delays at checkpoints, or humiliating treatment, cases of severe violence are uncovered from time to time.⁵

On the same day the events described in this report took place, *Ha'aretz* published an article about cases of abuse and humiliation of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories.⁶ *Ha'aretz* reported that, "At meetings held recently at Central Command and at various Israel Defense Forces headquarters in the West Bank, officers expressed concern about the phenomenon of abusive behavior of soldiers toward Palestinian civilians." The article listed several examples of humiliation of Palestinians by IDF soldiers, such as pointlessly holding up Palestinians at checkpoints, confining Palestinians to their cars on hot days, demanding "crossing fees" at checkpoints in the form of packs of cigarettes and soft drinks, beatings, puncturing tires, and confiscating car keys. Senior officers told *Ha'aretz* that they are concerned that, "The incidents that have been uncovered may be only the 'tip of the iceberg' of a much broader phenomenon."

In response to the article, the IDF Spokesperson stated that, "The IDF does not consider the instances described a phenomenon... The commanders conduct ongoing information activity emphasizing to the soldiers the importance of human dignity, and the difference between terrorists and Palestinian civilians who suffer from the situation created in the region... The IDF denounces such actions. When soldiers who have acted abusively are caught, they are tried with severity." The spokesperson added that, since the beginning of the *intifada*, the military police has opened eight investigations into cases of delay of Palestinians or into incidents of violence at checkpoints.

Contrary to the position of senior officers serving in the Occupied Territories, the IDF Spokesperson regards cases of abuse of Palestinians by security forces as one-time incidents that are thoroughly investigated rather than part of a wider phenomenon. It is precisely this attitude that precludes serious attention to the problem. This attitude reflects a blatant disregard of the harsh situation and indifference to the safety and dignity of Palestinians.

The case detailed in this report is a direct result of the system-wide neglect of abuse of Palestinians. The defense establishment has never made a serious effort to unequivocally articulate to its forces in the Occupied Territories that abuse is strictly forbidden, and that those who violate this prohibition will be severely punished. It is clear that the "ongoing information activity"

5. See B'Tselem reports regarding security forces' use of violence against Palestinians: B'Tselem, *Beatings, Maltreatment and Degradation of Palestinians by Israeli Authorities during June-July 1996*, September 1996; B'Tselem, *Sheer Brutality-The Beatings Continue: Beatings and Maltreatment of Palestinians by Border Police and Police Officers during May-August 1997*, August 1997; B'Tselem, *Builders of Zion: Human Rights Violations of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories Working in Israel and the Settlements*, September 1999; B'Tselem, *Standard Routine: Beatings and Abuse of Palestinians by Israeli Security Forces during the Al-Aqsa Intifada*, May 2001.

6. Amos Harel, "Soldiers Demanded 'Crossing Fee' from Palestinians at Checkpoints," *Ha'aretz*, 23 July 2001.

referred to by the IDF Spokesperson does not succeed in preventing cases of abuse. Testimonies of such abuse continue to reach B'Tselem and other human rights organizations. When speaking to a B'Tselem researcher, the soldiers did not deny that the serious incident described in this report took place. They even justified it. This response is the best proof that the military's

education and information activities against such violence are mere lip service and not a real attempt to eliminate the phenomenon once and for all.

B'Tselem urges the IDF to investigate this case quickly and thoroughly and to prosecute those responsible

Response of the IDF Spokesperson

Operations Directorate
IDF Spokesperson's Unit
Public Relations Branch
Tel: 972-3-6080-339/340
Fax: 972-3-6080-334
July 30 2001



To-

"B'tselem" – Mr. Lior Yavne

Subject: **"B'tselem" Report on Israeli Soldiers' Abuse of Palestinians**

Greetings,

Below please find our response to the B'tselem Report on the subject above:

Following an initial investigation by the commander of the battalion, it was decided to open a Military Police investigation. With its completion the results will be passed on to the Chief Military Advocate for his opinion.

The IDF firmly condemns events in which acts of violence are carried out against innocent people and will properly deal with all those who violate these instructions.

With regards,

Major, Efrat Segev
Public *Efrat* Relations

B'TSELEM - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories was founded in 1989 by a group of lawyers, authors, academics, journalists, and Members of Knesset. B'Tselem documents human rights abuses in the Occupied Territories and brings them to the attention of policymakers and the general public. Its data are based on independent fieldwork and research, official sources, the media, and data from Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations.
