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‘WE NEED TO TRAIN SOLDIERS TO BEHAVE AS POLICEMEN’

Israel to end night arrest of kids



SYLVIE LE CLEZIO

Islam Dar Ayyoub and his brother Karim, who have both been arrested by Israeli troops — Islam when he was 14 and Karim when he was nine — in their village of Nabi Saleh on the West Bank

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THE Israeli army has announced a comprehensive review of its policy of dealing with Palestinian children, including an immediate pilot program to end night-time

arrests. The review is to be detailed shortly to a committee of the Israeli parliament.

It comes shortly after a joint investigation by *The Australian* and the ABC's *Four Corners* program into Israel's military justice system.

That investigation showed that Israel enforces two legal systems in the occupied West Bank — one for Jews and one for Palestinians.

Israel's chief military prosecutor for the West Bank, Lieutenant Colonel Maurice Hirsch, told *The Jerusalem Post* that the army had decided to make "a general re-evaluation" of the situation.

He said the pilot program was "one of many decisions in a general re-evaluation of the situation, not only improving treatment of the rights of Palestinian minors, but also taking into account the potential operational benefits."

The *Jerusalem Post* said that since a UNICEF report on Israel's treatment of Palestinian children and following the *Four Corners* program there had been indications of upcoming change, but that Colonel Hirsch's revelation was the first official confirmation.

Last year, UNICEF found that the ill-treatment of Palestinian

children in the Israeli military detention system appeared to be "widespread, systematic and institutionalised."

It found: "Children have been threatened with death, physical violence, solitary confinement and sexual assault, against themselves or a family member."

After that Israel committed to begin a pilot program under which children would be issued with summonses rather than subjected to night-time arrests, but has not proceeded with that pilot program.

Israeli spokesman Yigal Palmor told *The Australian* that the

abuses alleged by UNICEF were "intolerable".

Mr Palmor said one problem was that soldiers, rather than policemen, were making arrests. "So we need to train soldiers to behave as policemen and that is something that's not so easy," he said.

The *Post* said the re-evaluation was being made in the context of a growing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement in Europe.

"But the more serious and probably more dangerous threat from an Israeli perspective — one that has been only slightly out of the news for some time — is the

International Criminal Court," it said. It added the terminology that some of Israel's accusers had used was directly from the Rome Statute, which related to "crimes against humanity."

Colonel Hirsch said that "much of the criticism of torture and abuse against Israel" — which Israel disputed — was alleged to have occurred during night-time arrests.

The hope was that the pilot program could "neutralise those complaints." He said if the program worked there would be "tremendous gains in saving people from operational dangers and

minimising future claims of abuse" and if it failed "we will have shown conclusively that summonses do not work" and there was no alternative to night arrests.

He added: "We have no intention of reducing the intensity of the fight against Palestinian terrorism, stone throwing and offences committed by minors."

SEARCH

...for John Lyons's investigation
...Courtesy: ABC Four Corners

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