

## Political

**update:** 11 December marks the 900<sup>th</sup> day of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit's captivity at the hands of Hamas – 11 December

### Key points:

- Israelis demonstrate for Gilad Shalit's release outside home of Prime Minister Olmert
  - Hamas continue to deny the International Committee of the Red Cross access to Shalit
  - British Parliamentarians campaign for Gilad's release and for the Red Cross to do more to monitor his condition
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### Latest developments

- On the 900<sup>th</sup> day of his captivity, thousands of people demonstrated outside the residence of Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, for the release of Israeli soldier Corporal Gilad Shalit, kidnapped from Israel into Gaza by Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committee (PRC) on 25 June 2006. Gilad's father, Noam Shalit, is expected to address the gathering.
- Both Labour and Conservative Friends of Israel have pledged to raise public awareness of the plight of Gilad Shalit. At the European Friends of Israel Conference in Paris from 6-7 November, Chair of Labour Friends of Israel, Andrew Gwynne MP and Vice Chair of Conservative Friends of Israel, Alistair Burt MP, announced that they will also increase pressure on the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to come to Shalit's aid.
- Gilad Shalit's health and whereabouts have been concealed by his captors since his abduction from Israeli soil 900 days ago. The ICRC has so far failed to gain access to Shalit, to confirm whether or not the injuries he suffered during his capture have been treated or to make progress in negotiations for his release.
- A number of letters, plus a recorded message, from Gilad Shalit have been passed by Hamas to his parents, via Egyptian and French mediators, as well as US President Jimmy Carter. In these messages Shalit has described his health as deteriorating. Noam Shalit, Gilad's father, has authenticated the handwriting and the voice in these communications as belonging to his son.
- The Head of the ICRC delegation to Israel, Pierre Wettach, said on Wednesday (10 December) he has done everything possible to make contact with Gilad Shalit but has not been able to overcome Hamas' obstacles. He said:

“The ICRC has repeatedly asked to be allowed to visit Gilad Shalit and to convey family messages to him. In early November, the ICRC requested that Hamas forward to him thousands of letters and greeting cards from various organizations, individuals and schoolchildren. Unfortunately, all these requests have been refused.” (10/12/08)

- Several dozen people held a rally outside Shikma Prison in Ashkelon, southern Israel, on 3 December over Shalit's abduction. They protested the fact that the 120 Palestinians imprisoned in Shikma receive regular visits from relatives and ICRC officials, while Hamas deny Gilad Shalit any such contact.

- Speaking to a group of students on Thursday (11 December), Israeli Foreign Minister and Kadima Party Chairwoman, Tzipi Livni, regretted that it may not be possible to secure Shalit's release:

“The thought that I can free Gilad and am not doing it is a horrible thought. We all want Gilad to come back home, but part of the willingness to fight [terrorists] is the understanding that we don't have any other choice. There is always a risk of minimum casualties, and it's not always possible to bring everyone back home.”

- A member of the Hamas leadership, Mahmoud Zahar, said on Thursday (11 December) that a deal to release Gilad Shalit could be reached very quickly if the Israeli Government could “gather the courage” to free Palestinian prisoners jailed for life in Israel. Zahar also refused another request by the ICRC to visit Shalit.
- Israel had already agreed to the release of 250 named Hamas militants in return for Shalit's release when Hamas submitted a further list of 450 militants in July 2008. 200 names from this list have also been approved for release, although in October Hamas' demands rose to 1,400 militants. There has been little progress in the Egyptian mediated talks between Israel and Hamas over Shalit's release since Hamas dramatically increased its demands.

## Background

- Corporal Gilad Shalit was kidnapped by Hamas and the PRC from Israeli soil on 25 June 2006. At the time of Shalit's capture he was 19 years old. He is now 22.
- Using a tunnel under the border between Gaza and Israel, Palestinian militants armed with anti-tank missiles, grenades and automatic rifles crossed into Israel and attacked an army facility in the area of Kibbutz Kerem Shalom. Two Israeli soldiers were killed and four more were seriously injured. The only trace of Shalit was a part of his uniform soiled in blood found close to the tank in which he was patrolling the border. The extent of the injuries he sustained at that time is still unknown.
- Corporal Gilad Shalit's unit were patrolling the Israeli side of the southern border with Gaza, a frequent target for Hamas' attacks. Since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in August 2005, terrorists in Gaza have fired over 5,000 rockets and mortars at Israel's southern communities.
- As a part of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, which began on 19 June, Hamas is obligated to make progress in securing the release of Gilad Shalit.
- In order to secure the release of the bodies of Staff Sergeant Eldad Regev, and Sergeant Major Ehud Goldwasser, kidnapped by Hezbollah in July 2006, Israel released convicted murderer Samir Kuntar on 16 July 2008. Kuntar had been in an Israeli prison for thirty years for killing a father and his four year old daughter in 1979. Many in Israel fear that Kuntar's release has demonstrated to Hamas the high price that the country is willing to pay for the return of its soldiers. On 22 October Kuntar vowed to continue his acts of terrorism, saying “As long as there is an entity called Israel in the region, we must continue the resistance.”
- Walking for Gilad: Walking for Freedom organised a march in London on 21 September 2008, the UN International Day of Peace, to campaign for Shalit's release. In October 2007 the Students' Forum of the World Zionist Federation held solidarity rallies in over 40 locations and cities around the world. Thousands of supporters campaigned on this day in Binyanei Ha'uma, Israel and in New York opposite the United Nations building.