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Palestinian Authority ordered murders of 16 land dealers*Eitan Rabin and Sami Sokol*

Israeli security officials have information that the Palestinian Authority ordered the murders of 16 land dealers who sold property to Jews or allegedly planned to do so. Security forces obtained a list of the land dealers and alerted 10 of them.

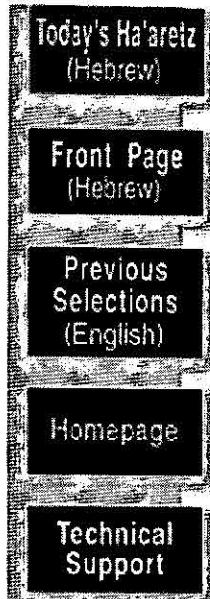
A security official involved in the investigation of the recent killings of land dealers said the list was prepared by the Palestinian Authority and passed on to its various security bodies. Among those who received it was a senior security official in Ramallah who is suspected of involvement in the weekend murder of Ali Mahmoud Jamhour, a resident of the Shuafat refugee camp in East Jerusalem.

Jamhour was the third Palestinian to be killed in recent weeks for allegedly selling real estate to Jews following a decision by the Palestinian Authority to impose the death sentence for such sales. His name, as well as the names of two other murdered land dealers, Farid Bashiti and Harbi Abu Shara, appeared on the list. The security source said that while some land dealers have hired bodyguards, there is concern that this will not prevent the slayings from continuing.

According to the classified report of the security officials, the Palestinian Authority took a political decision to murder land dealers who sold to Jews and verbally conveyed this to its security branches. Public Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani yesterday accused Palestinian Authority chairman Yasser Arafat of ordering the killings. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also condemned the murders of East Jerusalem residents who carry Israeli identity cards, saying it "damages the idea of peace and coexistence between us and the Palestinians.

Jerusalem district police have disclosed that they have evidence linking the head of security in Ramallah to the murders of Jamhour and Bashiti, as well as to the attempted kidnapping this week of a third land dealer, Assad Rajibi. Though Jerusalem police chief Yair Yitzhaki refused to name the official, he is believed to be Colonel Tawfik Tirawi, the Palestinian intelligence chief in Ramallah.

"We have evidence of the direct involvement of a head of security in the Palestinian Authority," Yitzhaki said yesterday. "In order to continue our activities, we need approval from the



political echelon.”

Jerusalem police foiled an attempt early Sunday morning by Palestinians to abduct Rajibi, 37, a resident of the Shuafat area. Rajibi and Jamhour were involved in the purchase of a house in the Abu-Tor neighborhood of Jerusalem, which was later sold to the settler group Elad.

Israeli police went to Rajibi's house after receiving intelligence information that Palestinian security officials involved in two previous murders were there and wanted to take Rajibi to Ramallah for questioning. "It was clear that if he was taken, he would meet the same fate as Bashiti and Jamhour," Deputy Superintendent Eli Mizrahi told reporters.

Security forces sent to the area spotted two cars speeding towards Ramallah. They gave chase and arrested the six kidnapers. Mizrahi said that the abductors were armed and that four of them were members of the Palestinian security branch responsible for the murders of Bashiti and Jamhour.

The Palestinian Authority information office issued a statement on Voice of Palestine Radio yesterday denying the Israeli charges of involvement in the murders. The statement said that while selling land to Jews is an offense punishable by death, the penalty would be implemented only within the framework of full legal proceedings. The statement added that the fact that the murders were carried out without trial was proof that the Israeli Shin Bet security service, and not the self-rule authority, was behind the killings.

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