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Spain: Amnesty International expresses solidarity with victims of attacks by armed groups

Unequivocally condemns abuses by armed groups and calls for action by governments to respect human rights

(Madrid) Participating at the International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security ahead of the first anniversary of the Madrid bombings, Amnesty International Secretary General, Irene Khan, called for the international community to adopt a comprehensive strategy to combat abuses by armed groups, which must have human rights at its centre.

"It is a brave and courageous move to mark the first anniversary of the Madrid bombings in which 192 people were killed and thousands more injured, with a discussion on how we should respond to terror. Brave, because many societies experiencing terror respond by living in fear. And once fear takes hold in a society, it can lead to a cycle and culture which creates a destructive dynamic in which everyone loses," said Irene Khan.

"The deliberate targeting of ordinary people constitutes a serious abuse of fundamental human rights and the basic principles of humanity. It cannot be tolerated or justified. Armed groups and individuals are not above the law -- they too have obligations."

"It is incumbent on us all to condemn those who commit atrocities such as the Madrid bombings. Such atrocities have to be fought, but without surrendering our basic values. If we fight terror with terror then others will have triumphed," Ms Khan stated.

Regrettably, the global security agenda pursued since 11 September 2001 has led to an increase in human rights abuses by armed groups, governments and individuals across all regions of the world. In many countries, new doctrines of security have stretched the concept of "war" into areas formerly considered law enforcement. This has led to the notion that human rights can be set aside when it comes to the detention, interrogation and prosecution of terrorist suspects.

The US Administration has blatantly disregarded the principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. Their policies of arbitrary detention, trial by military commission in Guantanamo, rendition of prisoners outside the rule of law, and the allegations of torture from Abu Ghraib and elsewhere have led

other governments to believe that violating human rights in the name of pursuing security is acceptable.

Around the world, from Darfur to Nepal, human rights crises are being ignored or justified in the name of security.

In 2004, Amnesty International documented serious human rights abuses by armed groups in 35 countries, including the deliberate and arbitrary killing of civilians, torture, kidnapping and hostage-taking.

Speaking at the Summit, Ms Khan said: "We must react to the threat posed by armed groups but we must not overreact. Unless the response of governments is firmly grounded in respect for human rights values and norms the result will not be a world of hope and security, but a world governed by fear. A fearful world is not a free world."

"Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is not optional. Neither arguments about security nor liberty justify the abuse of human rights. Neither States, armed groups nor individuals are above the law".

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