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New Zealand: Amnesty International headquarters raises concerns about asylum-seekers with government

In a letter to Immigration Minister Tuariki Delamere, the International Secretariat of Amnesty International has expressed serious concern about the jailing of asylum-seekers.

“We are very concerned, in particular, about the imprisonment of a man who the authorities apparently know bears marks consistent with torture on his body,” Australia-South Pacific Researcher Heinz Schürmann-Zeggel said from the human rights organization’s London headquarters. “For a person who has fled from torture, being in prison often means re-living the trauma.”

International standards state that asylum-seekers should not normally be detained. In exceptional cases, for certain specified reasons, it may be permissible to detain an individual for a limited period, and only after full consideration of all possible alternatives. Moreover, if asylum-seekers are detained on any such grounds, the detention should be given a regular and meaningful review by a court or judicial body.

“The Immigration Minister asserted that it is ‘standard policy’ to detain people with apparently ‘manifestly unfounded’ asylum claims. This fails to recognize the exceptional grounds for detention under international

standards and flouts New Zealand's human rights obligations," Amnesty International said.

"In any case, if the authorities have been alerted that an asylum-seeker shows signs of torture, how can the immigration minister deem his claim to be 'manifestly unfounded'?"

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For more information or to arrange an interview, please call Amnesty International's offices in Wellington on +64 4 499 3349 or +64 4 233 0558, or in London, UK, on 44 171 413 5566, or visit our website at <http://www.amnesty.org>