

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Philippines: Youth justice system and violations of children's rights**

Amnesty International expressed its concern today about worrying omissions and inadequate implementation of domestic law that leave children in detention in the Philippines vulnerable to torture or ill-treatment, and inappropriate sentencing.

"We are shocked by the huge discrepancy between the youth justice system on paper and that exercised in practice," the organization said launching its report "[Philippines: A different childhood: the apprehension and detention of child suspects and offenders](#)" (ASA 35/007/2003) highlighting the organization's key concerns regarding the apprehension and detention of children.

"There are serious and widespread defects in the administration of juvenile justice in the Philippines that must be urgently addressed," Amnesty International emphasized. "We urge the Philippine government to ensure that child detainees are treated in accordance with international standards, and to immediately and impartially investigate any allegations of torture and ill-treatment of children on arrest or in detention".

Filipino children who come into conflict with the law tend to come from the most disadvantaged and marginalized sectors of society. Many have been raised in poverty and have received little or no education. Many of the 200,000 children who live on the streets have suffered domestic violence or sexual abuse.

"Street children are particularly likely to be arrested as they may be forced to beg or steal in order to survive. Addiction to glue-sniffing is common and increases the risk of being taken into custody. They are particularly vulnerable in detention because they do not have family and community support," Amnesty International explained.

Often handcuffed on arrest, children may be subjected to punches and slaps with fists, or beatings with truncheons, rifle butts or canes. There have also been reports of the adults who accuse them of crimes assaulting child suspects in the presence of police, sometimes with active police participation. Some children have reported having their fingernails singed with a lit cigarette or being subjected to electric shocks.

There are indications that many children in detention have little or no understanding of why they were arrested or the charges against them. Children rarely have any access to lawyers and many have reported signing documents they did not understand. In detention, children -- both girls and boys -- have been raped and sexually assaulted. A serious and widespread problem is that child detainees are frequently held in adult jails. In some facilities they share cells with adults. Such intimate and constant

contact with adult detainees -- including those who have committed serious crimes -- leaves children highly vulnerable to sexual assault or other abuse.

Facilities are overcrowded, often oppressively hot and airless with inadequate sanitary facilities. In one prison in Luzon children had nowhere to sleep as the beds were taken by adult detainees and the floor was wet with urine. Prison visitors have reported seeing children fighting for food.

At least eight young people -- all aged under 18 at the time of their alleged offence -- are currently reportedly under sentence of death in the Philippines. In most of these cases their death sentences were imposed following an incorrect assumption on arrest that they were legally adults.

To download the report , please go to:

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa350072003>

To see Amnesty International's web action, please go to:

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/phl-110403-action-eng>

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