

## **Europe: 50 years of the European Convention**

*Fifty years after its adoption on 4 November 1950, the vision set out in the European Convention on Human Rights remains an unfinished project, Amnesty International said today in a new report on torture and ill-treatment across Europe.*

*"This landmark event in modern European history provided the cornerstone for the Council of Europe human rights system. The extraordinary achievements in standards for human rights protection deserve to be celebrated, however in practice much work remains to be done," the organization said.*

*Torture and ill-treatment persists across the European region -- from the United Kingdom to Azerbaijan. In the first six months, torture and ill-treatment was documented by Amnesty International in at least 25 countries, 20 of them member states of the Council of Europe including Belgium, Russia and Spain.*

*"The fact is that Europe is not a comfortable and secure place for all its inhabitants -- in many countries discrimination against vulnerable groups leads to torture or ill-treatment. Victims include members of ethnic, racial and religious minorities; immigrants; refugees and asylum-seekers; children and criminal suspects."*

*Despite the exemplary work of bodies such as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the political will to bring torturers to justice remains lacking. Amnesty International's report highlights the cycle of impunity which persists throughout the continent.*

Torture is widespread in Turkey but according to official figures, investigations of 577 security officials accused of torture between 1995 and 1999 resulted in only 10 convictions (1.7%). For example, Zeynep Avci, a young Kurdish woman, was reportedly subjected to electro-shocks and sexual torture in police custody in Izmir in 1996. Despite a formal complaint, the torturers have not been brought to justice. Zeynep Avci had to stop psychological treatment because security officers refused to vacate the room during therapy sessions.

Clement Nwankwo, a prominent Nigerian lawyer and human rights activist, travelled to Geneva, Switzerland in April 1997 to attend a UN human rights session. He complained that police officers stopped him on the street, kicked and punched him, racially abused him, beat him with batons and then put a baton across his neck. After being transferred to a police station, he was forced to strip naked and was handcuffed to a table leg for over an hour.

During his 72 hours of detention he was tried under a summary procedure which found him guilty of shoplifting and resisting police. The shoplifting charge was dropped after a formal challenge but no one has been brought to account for his ordeal.

"Only by taking concerted action against impunity will Europe have something truly worth celebrating in this anniversary year - governments must put the Convention into practice and take action to stamp out torture," Amnesty International said.

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