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Ukraine: Amnesty International urges new President to improve human rights

In a letter to the new President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko Amnesty International urged him to make full use of his first Presidency to take concrete steps to improve human rights in Ukraine.

"The new administration has the opportunity to significantly improve the protection of human rights in Ukraine, including by bringing relevant legislation in line with the Constitution of the country as well as with international human rights law and standards," Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International calls on the new administration to take concrete steps on the most pressing human rights challenges facing Ukraine at present:

To eradicate torture and ill-treatment in police custody

Anybody detained by the police is at risk of being tortured and conditions in pre-trial detention centres have been described as "intolerable" by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture. In recent months Amnesty International has documented cases of torture and ill-treatment in police custody. The organization calls on the new administration to take steps to set up an independent body to monitor places of detention and to ensure that detainees are fully informed of their rights and given access to medical examinations.

Curtailement of freedom of expression and assembly

Ukraine has a bad record on Freedom of Expression and the new administration must ensure that journalists and editors of independent news media are not subjected to unnecessary controls and prosecutions. The organization also calls for an impartial investigation into the "disappearance" of the investigative journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000.

During the election period Amnesty International publicized cases of arbitrary detention of opposition activists, the new administration must strive to ensure that nobody is detained or harassed by law enforcement officers for the peaceful expression of their views.

Violence against women

Amnesty International calls for improvements to the law on domestic violence to ensure that the rights of women are better protected. The new administration must also tackle the problem of trafficking in human beings and must ensure that judges are trained in the issue and that law enforcement officers are provided with adequate resources and training. Women and girls who wish to testify must be offered effective witness protection measures.

Refugees

In June 2004 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recommended that Ukraine observe the fundamental principles of international law concerning the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. Amnesty International calls on the new administration to improve the implementation of the Refugee Convention and to improve its law on asylum seekers.

International justice

Amnesty International urges Ukraine to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which would ensure an end to impunity for crimes under international law.

Background

Viktor Yushchenko was elected third President of Ukraine on December 26 after a tumultuous election campaign. The first round in the presidential elections in Ukraine was held on 31 October and resulted in a narrow win for the opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the election campaign was marked by overwhelmingly biased media coverage in favour of the government candidate Viktor Yanukovich. There were reports of pressure on voters to vote for particular candidates and irregularities at polling stations. The authorities failed to take remedial action between the two rounds of voting and the International Election Observation Mission reported that "State executive authorities and the Central Election Commission (CEC) displayed a lack of will to conduct a genuine democratic election process." Viktor Yanukovich was declared the winner of the second round. After ten days of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations by the supporters of the two candidates, the Supreme Court declared the elections invalid and ordered a rerun which was won by Viktor Yushchenko.

Public Document

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