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Ukraine must reform police ahead of Euro 2012

Ukraine must urgently reform its police force ahead of the UEFA Euro 2012 finals, Amnesty International warned today. As teams reflect on the results of today's draw, the organization expressed concern over the safety of fans coming into contact with Ukraine's notoriously corrupt police.

"Under the current system, Ukraine's police are very rarely held accountable for their actions. Officers frequently abuse their power to extort money or torture detainees into confessing to a crime they are under pressure to solve," said John Dalhuisen, Deputy Director for Amnesty International's Europe and Central Asia Programme.

Currently, abuses by police are investigated by their colleagues in the local prosecutor's office. Prosecutors are therefore reluctant to open a case. In its recent report *No Evidence of a Crime: Paying the price for police impunity in Ukraine* Amnesty International documented numerous cases where well-founded allegations of torture have been dismissed by prosecutors with the standard response "there is no evidence of a crime".

"As long as police officers continue to go unprosecuted for the crimes they commit, they are not accountable to the general public and are able to do as they please," said John Dalhuisen.

In October Amnesty International called on the Ukrainian authorities to make clear to their subordinates that police abuse will be subject to criminal investigation. It has also recommended that an independent agency be set up to effectively investigate complaints against the police.

Despite acknowledging the fact that thousands of Ukrainians are abused by police each year, the authorities dismissed the recommendations as impractical.

Amnesty International today reiterated its call for the establishment of an independent body to investigate police abuse, which the organization believes is essential to ensuring crimes by police officers are prosecuted, and therefore essential to ending police criminality.

"Every day Ukrainians are paying the price for their government's reluctance to reform the police. With thousands of international fans converging on Ukraine in summer 2012, there is a danger that they too may suffer at the hands of a police force with no concept of public service or accountability." John Dalhuisen said.

"Immediately establishing an independent agency to investigate police crimes would let officers know their actions could be investigated and prosecuted and should keep them on their best behaviour."