

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

### Public Statement

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## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL OPEN LETTER TO EU HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT

(Brussels 2 November 2004) In the lead-up to the EU Summit this week in Brussels, Amnesty International has today released an Open Letter to EU Heads of State and Government urging the EU to match its ambition to promote fundamental rights with concrete policies that are coherent and properly resourced.

*For the full text of the letter, go to <http://www.amnesty-eu.org> (from 09.00 Brussels time 2 November)*

Amnesty International's Open Letter provides a critical reflection on the human rights content of the "Hague Programme" (to be adopted at this week's EU Summit) which sets out a five-year policy framework designed to "strengthen freedom, security and justice" in the European Union.

The letter states:

"Amnesty International has become increasingly concerned that despite the intentions and appropriate references to fundamental rights there is too much of a vacuum in the substance of the Hague programme as to how the EU's stated ambition is to be realized. There is a lack of coherence when it comes to the instruments and structures needed to safeguard fundamental rights, and a lack of resources to match."

Among the issues covered:

- **Proposed EU Human Rights Agency**

Amnesty International says the move to set up an EU Human Rights Agency does not prove there is a real willingness on behalf of EU Member States to address their own human rights performance. Confidence in the EU's determination to protect fundamental rights is not inspired by the Commission's suggestion that the agency be "a lightweight structure in terms of staff and budget."

- **Shared EU-wide safeguards in criminal proceedings**

In the proposed Hague programme, the balance between the need to fight crime effectively and the need to protect individuals' fundamental rights is insufficient.

- **Common European asylum system**

While welcoming the commitment to a single asylum procedure, Amnesty International is concerned that the common asylum system is to be based on the low standards agreed so far and urges Member States to amend the directive on asylum

procedures in order to ensure that basic guarantees are fully available in fast track, admissibility and border procedures.

- **External dimension of asylum and migration**

The Hague Programme marks a decisive shift in the EU's ambition to take the fight against "illegal immigration" into the domain of external relations. "Partnership" with third countries has become a principal focus in efforts to stop people from entering the EU. However, as seen in the recent discussions over 'reception facilities' in neighbouring countries, there are many questions to be answered in regard to the EU's stated ambitions to control immigration, provide humanitarian assistance and support capacity building if protection obligations are to be fully respected. Amnesty International's Open Letter says it is significant to note that the conditions on third countries for such cooperation have been watered down from "fulfilling the obligations under the Geneva Convention" to "demonstrating a genuine commitment to fulfil the obligations".

*For the full text of the letter, go to <http://www.amnesty-eu.org> (from 09.00 Brussels time 2 November).*

**For further comment/background and interviews:**

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