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Morocco/Western Sahara: Torture of detainees must end

Morocco's failure to take action on persistent allegations of torture and ill-treatment in the Témara and other detention centres undermines the country's recent progress in the field of human rights, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

The report: *Torture in the "anti-terrorism" campaign - the case of Témara detention centre* reveals the systematic practice of torture and ill-treatment of suspects held at one of Morocco's main detention centres, near the capital Rabat.

The scores of people allegedly tortured are among hundreds of Islamists or presumed Islamists whom the authorities have been arresting since 2002 on suspicion of belonging to "criminal gangs" or involvement in violent acts, like the bombings in Casablanca in May 2003.

Amnesty International's research is based on testimonies from former detainees, families, human rights activists and lawyers. The report reveals a series of breaches of Moroccan law and international human rights standards at the Témara centre:

The centre is operated by Morocco's internal intelligence service, the Directorate for the Surveillance of the Territory (Direction de la Surveillance du Territoire, DST). Its personnel are neither agents nor officers of the judicial police and are not authorized under Moroccan law to arrest, detain or question suspects.

Those detained have been held in secret, sometimes for months, and have been denied access to their families or to the outside world.

Detainees have been blindfolded and handcuffed during interrogation. Some have been stripped or suspended from the ceiling in contorted positions. Many reported being beaten or threatened with the arrest and rape of their wife or female relatives.

Detainees have been forced to sign or thumb-print statements that have been, in many cases, used in court as evidence to obtain convictions.

Magistrates have failed to order investigations and medical examinations despite persistent allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

The detainees have been systematically denied their right to legal counsel from the beginning of the judicial process.

Some of the detainees have been sentenced to death after grossly unfair trials.

Amnesty International welcomes a draft law to combat torture and discrimination. But the

organization remains deeply worried about the authorities' failure to address the specific allegations of torture and ill-treatment in Témara, the lack of investigation and the government's arguments that such allegations are "baseless".

"Morocco must demonstrate the same resolve it has shown in addressing human rights problems of the past by taking strong measures to combat those of the present," said Amnesty International.

Background

The United Nations Committee against Torture which supervises the implementation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment examined Morocco in 2003. The Committee examined reports submitted by the Moroccan government and non-government organizations, including Amnesty International.

The Committee noted the positive development in the overall human rights situation in Morocco but expressed concern amongst other things about the increase of allegations of torture and ill-treatment, particularly those implicating the DST. The Committee specifically noted the absence of information on measures taken by the authorities to investigate complaints of torture and ill-treatment and to bring those responsible to justice.

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde290042004>

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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