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EU-BOSNIA: "DISAPPEARANCES" MUST BE ADDRESSED

(Brussels 5 March) Amnesty International today called on the European Union through its Police Mission in Bosnia to give more concrete direction to the Bosnian authorities to tackle the vast number of outstanding cases of 'disappearances' in the war-torn country outlined in a new 63-page report (*Bosnia-Herzegovina: Honouring the ghosts: Confronting impunity for "disappearances"*) available on www.amnesty-eu.org

The human rights organisation has outlined its call in an open letter to the Secretary General of the Council and EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana.

It is estimated that over 17,000 people remain unaccounted for since the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina ended seven years ago. Many of these 'disappeared' people were last sighted in the hands of the various armed forces, and are now presumed dead.

"It is important that the international community, and in particular the EU, does not leave the job 'half-done'," said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

"The EU must reaffirm its commitment to ensure that the massive human rights violations of Bosnia's recent past are addressed. It is therefore essential that the EU provides clear and unequivocal political direction to ensure that the EU Police Mission in Bosnia gives high priority to supervising and monitoring investigations by local police into cases of 'disappearances' and does not simply limit its human rights monitoring to the present."

"Despite repeated calls from Amnesty International, there have been no assurances or even indications that the EU intends to make this a priority for the EU Police Mission in Bosnia," said Dick Oosting.

Amnesty International calls on the EU to contribute to the development in practice of effective witness protection programs in close cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and prioritize the monitoring of the effectiveness of these programs.

Aside from awarding long-overdue justice to all victims, Amnesty International believes prosecuting the perpetrators of concrete cases of 'disappearances' will be the real litmus test for the comprehensive, lengthy and costly process of reform of the Bosnian judiciary and law enforcement agencies.

In view of the envisaged closure of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in 2008 it should be of the highest priority for the international community that these reforms result in a functioning justice system in Bosnia.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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