

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 37/017/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 197
1 November 2002

Sri Lanka: Amnesty International urges the government to stop torture

Amnesty International today wrote to the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremasinghe, urging him to implement key recommendations made by the Committee against Torture (CAT) after the results of their confidential inquiry into allegations of a systematic practice of torture in Sri Lanka were presented to the United Nations General Assembly.

"We have had a long-standing concern about torture, including rape, reported both in the context of the armed conflict and routine police investigations," Amnesty International wrote in the letter.

Amnesty International urged a thorough and impartial review of the role of the police, magistrates and doctors in relation to the prevention and investigation of torture. The organisation also called for the setting up of an investigative body fully independent of the police with the necessary powers and expertise required to open criminal investigations wherever there is a reasonable ground to believe torture has been committed.

"No perpetrators of torture have so far been convicted in a criminal court, despite the reported filing of some cases," Amnesty International added.

The organization appreciates that some measures have already been taken, including the instructions sent to the Inspector General of Police to all police units that under no circumstances should torture be permitted, and the setting up of the "Prosecution of Torture Perpetrators Unit" in the Attorney General's Department. However frequent and continuing reports of torture prove the need for the full implementation of the recommendations made by CAT in its recent report, many of which echo recommendations made by Amnesty International in its reports on torture and rape in custody published in June 1999 and January 2002 respectively.

Amnesty International also informed the Prime Minister that it will be seeking clarification from the CAT about its unclear and equivocal findings that "a disturbing number of cases of torture and ill-treatment are taking place, mainly in connection with the armed conflict, its practice is not systematic". This conclusion appears to be at odds with CAT's assessment that reports of torture are high, ongoing concerns that instructions to police and security forces not to commit torture are not always obeyed, and investigations into allegations of torture are not satisfactory.

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