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United Nations member States failing on human rights

(OSLO) The United Nations member States, individually and collectively, have failed to uphold human rights, said Colm O’Cuanachain, Chair of Amnesty International speaking at the Centennial Nobel Peace Prize Symposium today.

“In response to the horrific human rights abuses of 11 September, governments are moving to restrict civil liberties and human rights, ostensibly to promote security. These UN member States must be held accountable for their failure to promote human rights within a security framework.”

“Now, at a point in time when human rights provide us with the legal framework for democracy and governance, Amnesty International cannot stand by as politicians erode hard-won human rights provisions in the name of security.”

Mr O’Cuanachain made these statements today as he delivered a lecture to other Laureates entitled: Peace and human rights: the unbreakable bond.

“Peace cannot exist in the absence of human rights. The guarantee of peace is a society structured in a human rights framework, characterized by equality, justice, and respect.”

“Human rights foster human security, and any attack on human rights is an attack on human security.”

Amnesty International stated that the roots of conflict must be tackled if true peace is to blossom. “Allowing injustice to fester can create an environment in which the oppressed, the voiceless, the confused and the isolated may manifest their sense of injustice as a threat to peace and security.”

“We must not let fear win. By responding to peoples' fear in an irresponsible fashion politicians risk eroding human rights,” Mr O’Cuanachain urged. “In this security overdrive what is clear is that without human rights there can be no security or democracy.”

Amnesty International is convinced that the current climate of international cooperation creates a window of opportunity that must be grasped with alacrity and used to build a sustainable agenda for human rights. Mr O’Cuanachain closed his speech by urging all Nobel Laureates to join this global coalition for human rights.

Background:

Amnesty International has expressed its concern at the United Nations upholding of human rights. For example:

- In its April 2001 session, the UN Commission Human Rights failed in its principal duty to protect victims of appalling human rights violations who happen to live in powerful countries like China, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia.
- Impunity has not been tackled appropriately in Sierra Leone because of the lack of will by member States to contribute to meet the costs of establishing the Special Court for Sierra Leone.
- Amnesty International called on the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-general for Kosovo in August 2001, to stop using Executive Orders to detain criminal suspects. These detentions violate detainees' basic rights: they are not ordered by a court, fail to provide detainees with details of the reasons for arrest or any charges against them, and provide no mechanism for detainees to challenge the legality of their detention.
- The UN Security Council Resolution 1373 has adopted wide-ranging measures to combat what are broadly described as "terrorists acts". Amnesty international is concerned that the terms "terrorists" and "terrorist acts" in the resolution is open to widely differing interpretations and therefore may facilitate violations of human rights in states that are bound to implement the resolution.

Colm's speech is available on-line by visiting
<http://web.amnesty.org/mavp/av.nsf/pages/hrd2001>
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