

AI INDEX:EUR 45/13/97

EMBARGOED FOR 0001 GMT THURSDAY 27 JUNE 1997

United Kingdom: An Agenda for Human Rights Protection

Amnesty International has written to the new United Kingdom Prime Minister, Tony Blair, with an agenda for human rights protection which highlights key human rights issues to be addressed by his new government as a matter of priority.

"The new government has an opportunity to make significant moves for human rights protection throughout the United Kingdom," Amnesty International said. "In our work on the country over the years, we have identified laws, procedures and practices of law enforcement officials which have led to violations of the rights to life, to freedom from torture or other forms of cruel treatment, to fair trial, and to freedom of expression and assembly."

Amnesty International believes that the new government should, among other things and as a matter of priority,

- ensure that UK law and practice are consistent with the full range of international and regional human rights law and standards;
- establish a Human Rights Commission which would have full and effective powers to strengthen human rights protection;
- establish a wide-ranging and independent inquiry into the patterns behind the significant numbers of deaths in custody due to alleged violence which have occurred in England in recent years. The inquiry should investigate a wide range of issues including why a disproportionate number of victims were from ethnic minorities;
- arrange for independent investigations to be carried out into allegations of ill-treatment, and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice;
- review the inquest system;
- re-instate the fundamental, historically recognized right to remain silent both during initial police interviews and during trial;
- ensure that no one will be deported to a country where they would face serious human rights violations, irrespective of national security considerations;
- set up a wide-ranging review of the asylum process leading to fair and efficient procedures, minimizing the current unacceptable delays and including an in-country right of appeal;
- revise the strategic export control system to include formally developed mechanisms for making human rights assessments in order to identify which types of equipment or services might be used for human rights violations in particular countries;

In relation to Northern Ireland, Amnesty International believes that -- given the large number of human rights violations perpetrated there -- there is a particular need for the

government to review a number of issues, including policing and emergency legislation provisions, with a view to increasing the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland.

"The protection of human rights and the creation of a human rights culture are central to a lasting peace," Amnesty International said.

The organization considers that many provisions in the emergency legislation are in breach of international treaties and standards, and urges the government to ensure that all legislation is in conformity with such standards.

"Despite the many serious allegations of human rights violations in the past in Northern Ireland, there has been a marked failure by previous governments to carry out wide-ranging independent investigations into such allegations and to make the findings public," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International is also concerned by the authorities' failure to ensure that policing is carried out in an even-handed manner, and considers that a fundamental review must be carried out into all aspects of policing in Northern Ireland.

With regards to the new government's commitment to place human rights at the heart of foreign policy, Amnesty International looks forward to seeing strong political interest and leadership in these matters -- both in the UK's bilateral relations and within the fora of inter-governmental organizations such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

"This central role given to human rights should include ensuring a consistent and open approach, with all countries being subjected to similar scrutiny and treatment over human rights," Amnesty International said.
ENDS.../

**For further information or to arrange an interview, please contact Soraya Bermejo,
Amnesty International Press Office on +44 171 413 5562**