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RWANDA: OPEN LETTER FROM AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO THE RWANDESE PRESIDENT ON THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE GENOCIDE.

On the second anniversary of the genocide and other massacres in Rwanda, Amnesty International today sent an open letter to the President of Rwanda urging him to put in place strong human rights safeguards to ensure that the events which began on 6 April 1994, in which as many as one million of people died, will never be repeated.

“Rwanda still hovers between hope for the future and fear of the legacy of the past. The Rwandese Government has given frequent promises that human rights will be respected, but concrete measures are needed to turn these promises into reality,” Amnesty International said.

In recognition of the enormous challenges which still face the authorities in the aftermath of the genocide, the human rights organization called on the international community to continue assisting Rwanda in the reconstruction of the institutions which should protect human rights -- in particular, the judiciary and the security forces -- and to assist in the implementation of reforms and practices which will make human rights a reality.

In its overview of the human rights situation since April 1995, the organization pointed out that arbitrary arrests are estimated at several hundred a week, detention without charge or trial stands at over 67,000, hundreds have died because of prison conditions and killings are continuing in Rwanda. In the light of this situation, the open letter to the President presents a set of ten recommendations for immediate action. It urges the President to:

1. Publicly denounce human rights abuses by government forces and by opposition groups whenever they occur.
2. Ensure that human rights activists and others who are attempting to speak out about the human rights situation in Rwanda are able to do so without intimidation, threats or fear of human rights violations.
3. Stop arbitrary arrests and prolonged detention without charge or trial. Ensure that there is a legal basis for all arrests and detentions and order the release of detainees against whom there is insufficient evidence.
4. Stop torture in the *cachots* and military detention centres and issue strict orders to security officials that torture will not be tolerated. Ensure that those found responsible for ordering or carrying out torture are brought to justice.

5. Accelerate the process of improving prison conditions, for example by transferring detainees to additional sites as a temporary measure to relieve overcrowding.
6. Ensure that forthcoming trials in Rwanda of those accused of having participated in the genocide and other massacres are conducted in accordance with international standards of fairness, and without recourse to the death penalty.
7. Ensure that extrajudicial executions and “disappearances” of unarmed civilians are immediately stopped. All reports of these human rights violations should be the subject of an independent and impartial investigation, the results made public within a reasonable time and those found responsible brought to justice.
8. Institute measures to guarantee protection and security for the Rwandese refugees.
9. Continue cooperating closely with international agencies involved in human rights work and protection of returnees.
10. Continue cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in its investigations into crimes against humanity committed in Rwanda during 1994.

“These measures, if they were implemented, would also contribute significantly to reassuring Rwandese refugees in neighbouring countries that they can return to their homes without fear of victimization or injustice,” Amnesty International said. “Declarations and promises are never enough.”

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