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1997 UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS: THE COMMISSION AT 50 -- A MID LIFE CRISIS.

GENEVA -- With an increasing global economy more and more governments look set to demote human rights as a key message of foreign policy in exchange for access to business markets, Amnesty International said today at the end of the UN Commission's annual 6-week session.

"Because of trade and regional solidarity most states avoided direct confrontation. Dialogue and quiet diplomacy was the game in town, which too often became quiet diplomacy," the human rights organization said.

During its session, the Commission confronted **Indonesia** about violations in **East Timor** and appointed a Special Rapporteur on **Nigeria**. But, once again, major human rights violators including **Algeria**, **China** and **Turkey** escaped scrutiny by the UN's primary human rights body. Other countries on the Commission's agenda such as **Burundi** and **Rwanda** were allowed to write their own pro-government resolutions.

"France's decision to block European Union (EU) consensus on China earned it applause from the Chinese Government and confirmation of lucrative business contracts," Amnesty International said. "With millions of dollars on the line, any commitment to human rights principles just faded away."

Gross human rights abuses by security forces and armed opposition groups in **Algeria** were again ignored by the Commission. Quiet diplomatic approaches by some European countries did not result in a firm invitation to the special rapporteurs on torture and extrajudicial executions to visit Algeria in 1997.

"For the victims of human rights abuses in Algeria this year's Commission was just another brick in the international community's wall of silence on Algeria," Amnesty International said.

The resolution on the human rights situation in **East Timor** is a step in the right direction. It is a reflection of governments' frustration with the Indonesian Government's failure to respect human rights.

"After three years of dithering, the Commission has sent a clear message to the Indonesian authorities that they must now act to protect human rights. The 1998 session of the Commission must ensure that Indonesia is held to account for implementing the resolution including access to East Timor for human rights organizations," Amnesty International said..

Nigeria, after refusing to implement last year's Commission resolution, will have its human rights record scrutinized by a special rapporteur. Efforts by members of the African

Group of the Commission to subvert the appointment were unsuccessful but other African states supported the resolution or abstained, thereby ensuring its adoption.

“At last the Commission has given a response which reflects the gravity of the situation,” Amnesty International said. “Human rights organizations expect the Commission to follow-up at its next session.”

Turkey escaped scrutiny yet again by the Commission. EU commitments to persuade Turkey to invite the Special Rapporteur on torture collapsed mid-way through the Commission.

“Once again their behind-the-scenes quiet diplomacy failed to yield the goods,” Amnesty International said. “By letting Turkey off the hook the European Union shied away from upholding human rights in Europe by opting for regional ‘solidarity’.”

France systematically undermined the initiatives, giving mixed signals to its EU partners and NGOs about its own position.

Amnesty International is outraged that human rights defender, _anar Yurdatapan, guest speaker at the organization’s parallel meeting on Turkey at the Commission, was detained in Turkey on Wednesday 16 April and is still in incommunicado detention.

China exploited the divisions within the Western Group to its own advantage to avoid a vote on a draft resolution mildly critical of its human rights record.

“For now China has suppressed Commission scrutiny. This diplomatic victory was achieved through threats and bullying tactics and because countries like Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain put business before human rights,” Amnesty International said.

“In bowing to pressure they have sent China a clear signal that it can show contempt for international rules. The victims’ voice will still be heard and the government called to account.”

Faced with some of the worst human rights abuses since the Second World War the Commission has become almost irrelevant in protecting victims in **Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire**.

“The Commission has failed to make its voice heard in ensuring that human rights are essential to political initiatives on the Great Lakes, that perpetrators are held to account and to ensure the necessary resources to carry out human rights work in all three countries,” Amnesty International said.

A carefully worded and negotiated Chairperson’s statement welcomed the opening of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ Office in **Colombia** but expressed concern about continuing widespread human rights violations and impunity.

“The High Commissioner’s Office will be judged on its ability to monitor human rights violations, issue detailed public reports, protect human rights victims and enhance respect for human rights in a country racked with grave human rights abuses,” the organization said.

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