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UN COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS: GOVERNMENTS SACRIFICE HUMAN RIGHTS FOR POLITICAL EXPEDIENCY

GENEVA – Human rights lost out to economic and political horsetrading at this year’s United Nation’s Commission on Human Rights -- as governments backed off from tackling violations committed by their allies or trading partners.

“The Commission is a barometer for gauging government commitment to human rights -- and the reading this year is that fewer and fewer states are willing to stand up to torturers and killers regardless of the political or economic cost,” the organization said.

“All too often human rights violations were ignored, or traded for the sake of a fudged consensus,” Amnesty International said. “The bottom line is that the the very body set up to police human rights violations has once more failed to condemn or scrutinize countries committing gross violations of those rights.”

“Trade contracts worth millions of US dollars are determining the European Union’s policy on human rights in China,” Amnesty International said. “While once again, the Commission took a political decision not to confront the Indonesian government over its lack of respect for fundamental human rights.”

Overall, the Commission opted for consensus resolutions and evaded its responsibility to deal objectively with the human rights situation in a number of countries, Amnesty International said.

The search for a conciliatory tone conveniently avoids pointing the finger at countries blatantly violating the human rights of their citizens, the organization said. Negotiating with these countries prevents the Commission from giving an objective assessment of the human rights situation. Ultimately, governments used the “consensus rule” as a tactic to avoid legitimate condemnation and international scrutiny.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S CONCERNS

China again avoided criticism by the Commission of its appalling human rights record. The Chinese delegation used a procedural rule to ask the Commission not to take any action of the draft resolution on the human rights situation in China. The “motion to take no action” was adopted by a majority of seven votes. The Commission, therefore, avoided voting on the draft resolution.

The European Union lacked a commitment to condemn China's human rights record. With promises of increased trade China successfully derailed Europe's supposed commitment to human rights. Germany and France are the main proponents of the conciliatory approach towards China and both countries expect to secure lucrative trade deals.

Amnesty International had urged the Commission to appoint a special rapporteur on **Colombia**, a recommendation which was also made by the Commission's own special rapporteurs and working groups. Member governments of the Commission, however, chose to ignore the recommendations of their own human rights experts. Instead there were negotiations with the Colombian authorities which resulted in an agreed statement from the Chairman of the Commission.

Amnesty International deplores the fact that the Commission did not appoint a special rapporteur, which would have been the most effective response to the worsening human rights situation in Colombia. The organization, however, acknowledges that the statement identifies in strongly worded terms the gravity of the situation with respect to the questions of impunity, violations of the rights to life, "disappearances", practice of torture and the military courts.

Amnesty International welcomes the decision of the Commission to establish an office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Colombia in charge of promoting, protecting and monitoring human rights. But Amnesty International is concerned that no time frame has been determined for the setting up of this Office, and that no decisions have been taken concerning the crucial question of the structure and resources allocated to it.

For several years Amnesty International has drawn the attention of the international community to the grave human rights situation in **Indonesia & East Timor**. These violations have also been confirmed by the UN's own human rights experts.

This well-attested evidence was ignored by the Commission which chose to negotiate a Chairman's statement with the Indonesian authorities. The statement which addresses the situation in East Timor is weak and ignores the fact that similar statements in 1994 and 1995 did not lead to a real improvement in the human rights situation.

The Commission has ignored for years widespread and systematic violations of human rights in **Nigeria**. The international community was only moved to act after the execution of **Ken Saro-Wiwa** and eight other Ogoni activists.

A proposal to appoint a special rapporteur on Nigeria was yet another victim of the "consensus rule". Dialogue with the Government of Nigeria took precedence over addressing the human rights situation despite the fact that the Nigerian authorities show little interest in cooperating with the human rights bodies.

The Commission totally ignored the massive human rights violations in **Turkey**. In private government delegations admitted that the situation of human rights in Turkey is very serious. But geopolitical and economic interests took precedence over human rights. Western governments should demonstrate their impartiality and independence on human rights and not resort to double standards, Amnesty International said.

For more information on Amnesty International's concerns in Colombia, or to arrange an interview, please call:

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