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UNITED NATIONS: PEACE-KEEPERS MUST PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS
SAYS AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

An Amnesty International delegation is today in Mozambique talking to United Nations' peace-keepers there - and launching an appeal for a systematic approach to human rights in peace-keeping worldwide.

"Peace-keeping operations have mushroomed dramatically over the last two years," said Amnesty International. "We believe it is crucial that human rights are made intrinsic to all peace-keeping operations. Although some operations have had a generally positive impact on human rights protection, in others - Angola and Somalia, for example - the neglect of human rights has been disastrous.

"Several projects have been very imaginative and have made monitoring and reporting on human rights an essential part of the peace-keeping operation. But in other countries, human rights have been left out of the plans and UN personnel have stood by, silent, while serious human rights violations were taking place. That must not be allowed to continue."

The worldwide human rights organization is now calling for a considered appraisal of recent and current peace-keeping operations, and has put forward a 15-point program of recommendations for the UN's peace-keeping activities. "We would like to see a coherent approach," said Amnesty International, "one that insists on prevention of human rights violations and promotion of human rights having a central role, even after the blue berets have left."

In its report, Amnesty International is severely critical of shortcomings in the way human rights have been dealt with in UN operations. In Angola, for example, the human rights situation is once again dire, with many hundreds of politically-motivated killings of prisoners and civilians by both government and UNITA (the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) reported since November 1992, after UNITA rejected the results of the election there. Amnesty International believes that the UN's inability to insist on action to tackle human rights violations contributed to the eventual breakdown of the peace process.

In Somalia, the UN's massive military operation was intended to end the inter-clan killings which were obstructing famine relief, and to rebuild the devastated country. Any success it achieved in distributing humanitarian aid was offset by a five-month stand-off between UN troops and the Somali faction of General Mohamed Farah Aidid, in which UN troops killed or detained hundreds of Somalis. Some of the killings seemed to be unlawful by international standards and the UN held detainees without charging them, defining their legal status or allowing them access to their families.

Said Amnesty International: "UN troops must never be permitted to violate the UN's own hard-won standards or consider themselves outside the treaties which the UN calls on governments worldwide to respect. The lesson learned in Somalia is that peace-keepers must not consider themselves above the law - it is essential that the UN make a definitive statement as soon as possible, affirming that all its personnel will be bound by UN standards.

"We would also expect that any future violations by UN personnel will be investigated thoroughly, and we call on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, once this new post is filled, to ensure that this happens. Otherwise the crucial question of who monitors the monitors will continue to go unanswered."

At the moment, three Amnesty International delegates are in Mozambique, looking at how UN peace-keeping efforts are working there. Said Amnesty International: "Mozambique offers an important opportunity to build respect for human rights in a society torn apart by more than 15 years of war."

"It is imperative that human rights are promoted and respected in Mozambique and we urge the UN to take up our 15-point program in its operations worldwide - in countries such as Cambodia, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, South Africa and Bosnia-Herzegovina."

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