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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 14/94

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**24 January 1994**

**SRI LANKA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES RATIFICATION OF UN CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE**

**Amnesty International welcomes the accession of Sri Lanka to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, on 3 January 1994.**

**The human rights organization sees this initiative as a positive step towards the protection and promotion of human rights in Sri Lanka. It has been concerned for many years at widespread reports of torture and ill-treatment in the country. In a letter to President D B Wijetunga, it expressed the hope that Sri Lanka's accession to the Convention will be made widely known throughout the country to underline the government's commitment to taking effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to prevent acts of torture.**

**Amnesty International also urged the Sri Lankan Government to make additional declarations under Articles 21 and 22 of the Convention in which it would recognize the competence of the Committee against Torture (set up under the Convention) to receive communications from another state party or from individuals under their jurisdiction who wish to complain about a violation of the Convention against Torture. Amnesty International considers the system for complaints of this nature to be an essential part of the protective mechanisms set up under the Convention. The struggle against torture is considerably weakened if these declarations are not made by State Parties.**

**States which have ratified or acceded to the UN Convention against Torture undertake a binding commitment to "take effective legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to prevent acts of torture". They must also accept that torture cannot be justified in any circumstances - for example torturers cannot use the excuse that they were carrying out orders from their superior officers and governments cannot claim that a war or state of emergency or political instability justifies torture. Victims or their families must be able to receive fair compensation and "rehabilitation". States party must also agree never to allow a statement extracted under torture to be used as evidence in court - however, when alleged torturers are being tried such a statement may be introduced in court as evidence that the victim of torture made the statement.**

**States party must also submit periodic reports to the Committee against Torture in which they describe the measures they have taken to ensure that the convention is being fully respected. The Committee against Torture is made up of 10 experts elected by all the states party but sitting in their personal capacity as independent experts. They meet twice a year in Geneva and examine the reports of states party in public, asking the state's representatives questions and making comments about their implementation of the Convention against Torture.**

**If the Committee receives reliable information indicating that torture is systematically practised by a state party it may appoint one or more of its members to make a confidential inquiry.**

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