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Ukraine's parliamentarians must effectively address police abuse ahead of elections

Amnesty International has urged Ukrainian parliamentarians ahead of parliamentary elections on 28 October to commit publicly to addressing police abuse in the country.

One year since Amnesty International launched its report "No Evidence of a Crime: Paying the Price for Police Impunity in Ukraine", a review of the manifestos of all major parties contesting the elections shows that none of the parties have put forward a concrete proposal for investigating and punishing endemic police criminality in Ukraine.

In a number of recent surveys, between 63.9 and 84 percent of Ukrainians have said that they don't trust their police force. Amnesty International is therefore concerned by politicians' failure to put concrete proposals on how to address police abuse to the electorate.

Amnesty International's report highlighted the widespread and systemic nature of police abuse in Ukraine, encouraged by prosecutors who refuse to investigate complaints against their colleagues in the police force. It called for the immediate establishment of an independent institution to effectively investigate allegations of human rights violations by law enforcement officials.

In meetings with Amnesty International last month the current administration and major opposition parties expressed support for such a body, formed under the new Criminal Procedure Code. However, each has yet to publicly commit to establishing an independent institution for complaints against police.

If politicians are serious about finally ending the horrific abuse visited by police on thousands of Ukrainian citizens each year, it is time they came out in favour of an independent body that would properly investigate crimes by police.

Amnesty International continues to receive allegations of torture and other ill-treatment from those who suffer at the hands of the police. On Thursday Mikhail Belikov underwent bowel surgery for the second time as part of an effort to repair his colon after he was raped with a police baton by officers in Donetsk in June.

Officers had taken him to a subdivision of Petrovskiy police station in Donetsk because he was reportedly drinking in public, although no charges were ever brought against him. He told Amnesty International four officers held him down as another applied a condom to the baton and raped him.

Three officers have been arrested and charged in connection with the event but at least two officers who took part are not being investigated and continue to work as police officers. The first hearing in the trial of the three officers took place this morning, during which they were remanded in custody.

Also in Donetsk, prosecutors have so far failed to investigate allegations that Donetsk police officers sexually assaulted and beat three young women in June. Following a court appeal the prosecutor's decision not to investigate has been reversed, but no action has been taken.

Police officers committing criminal offences must be punished to send a clear message that such behaviour will not be tolerated any longer. They need to know that they will face a rigorous, impartial and effective investigation into every allegation of abuse.

On Friday Amnesty International will be presenting a petition of over 25,000 signatures to the Presidential Administration, calling for the establishment of an independent institution to investigate police abuse. The delivery will be preceded by a visual demonstration of how caged prisoners assaulted by police could be protected by an independent body of investigators.

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