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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL RELEASES FINDINGS FROM SPAIN/MOROCCO

EU PRESSURE TO "KEEP PEOPLE OUT" CONTRIBUTING TO SERIOUS ABUSE OF MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

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(Brussels/Madrid 26 October 2005) On the eve of the EU summit in Hampton Court where Spain and France are due to launch a joint initiative on controlling immigration, Amnesty International releases findings from a 10-day mission to Spain and Morocco. These findings not only show that gross human rights abuses against migrants are occurring on Europe's borders, but that no-one is taking responsibility.

The Amnesty International mission follows the deaths of at least eleven people and injuries to many others trying to enter the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. The findings were released at a press conference in Madrid today.

Amnesty International is concerned that the European Union's response to this latest crisis, following similar crises in Italy and Malta, will again be almost exclusively centred on controlling illegal immigration.

The human rights organisation says EU Member States must recognize that the political and economic pressure they are exerting on neighbouring countries to "keep people out of Europe" is contributing to a chaotic situation. There is a need for a global strategy that ensures that the human rights of some of the world's poorest people are protected regardless of whether they qualify as refugees or not.

"The evidence we saw showed that law enforcement officers used force which is both unlawful and disproportionate, including lethal weapons. They injured and killed people trying to cross the fence. Many of those seriously injured inside Spanish territory were pushed back through fence doors without any legal formality or medical assistance," said Javier Zúñiga, head of Amnesty International's delegation to Spain and Morocco, and Senior Advisor to Regional Programmes at the International Secretariat in London.

Amnesty International notes that even the recent EU technical mission to the area acknowledged the lack of adequate refugee protection in Morocco. The EU mission was told that this protection gap has led to the "refoulement" by Moroccan authorities of asylum seekers and people already recognised as refugees by the UNHCR.

Furthermore hundreds of migrants, including asylum seekers, were transported to remote desert regions near the border with Algeria and then ordered to walk across the frontier

towards towns inside Algeria. They were left with no or inadequate supplies of food and water.

Amnesty International's findings also highlight critical difficulties for migrants attempting to seek asylum at the Spanish borders. So far few proposals have emerged either from individual EU Member States or the EU collectively to address this issue, nor to address the inhumane treatment of people who do not qualify as refugees under the Geneva Convention.

"Europe must find collective solutions to a problem to which it has contributed which ensures people are not killed or injured at EU borders, and that those wishing to claim asylum can do so freely," Javier Zúñiga said.

The human rights organisation underlined its grave concern that the report of the EU technical mission includes proposals aimed at enhancing migration controls, even regarding cooperation with countries where there are massive human rights abuses including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ivory Coast.

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