

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: POL 30/029/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 243
8 September 2005

Respect for human rights the only way to security

(Helsinki) European governments must not roll back the absolute prohibition against torture and ill-treatment in the name of counter-terrorism. They should instead affirm that respect for human rights is the route to security not the obstacle to it, said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, referring to the European Union (EU) meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers gathering in Newcastle, United Kingdom.

Amnesty International urged EU Member States to reject any moves to pursue so-called "diplomatic assurances" or memoranda of understanding which would facilitate the forcible return of people to countries where there is torture.

"Diplomatic assurances are not worth the paper they are written on and to claim that judges should not look into these agreements is an attempt to interfere with the independence of the judiciary," cautioned Ms Khan, referring to statements by UK government Ministers that the British judiciary should respect deals being sought with other governments to deport individuals.

Amnesty International called on governments to uphold the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

"We need to take a broader approach to security. We live in an endangered, unsafe and unfair world: endangered by threats of environmental degradation; made unfair by shocking problems of poverty, disparity and disease in the midst of great prosperity and unsafe because of forgotten and not-so forgotten conflicts, as well as increasing threats of terrorism and inappropriate counter-terrorism measures," said Ms Khan addressing the more than 600 participants from 73 countries at the Helsinki Conference "Mobilising Political Will" on the challenges of globalization, democracy and security.

"There is no shortage of ideas on global security, what is needed is the political will to promote a security agenda based on human rights rather than one that seeks to undermine them. A lot of lip-service is paid to human rights by governments. Political will is not an abstract challenge to governments, but an urgent call for concrete action without which key commitments could be derailed at the World Summit next week."

As governments prepare to meet in New York next week, Amnesty International called on leaders gathered at the 2005 World Summit to be visionary and bold, and reaffirm their commitment to a strong and effective UN that recognises the equal importance of human rights, security and development.

Ms Khan set out the four areas that serve as litmus tests of world leaders' willingness to address the

real issues that lead to insecurity for the majority of the world's population:

- Responding to terrorism without sacrificing human rights;
- Controlling the proliferation of small arms and conventional weapons;
- Delivering Economic, Social and Cultural Rights through the Millennium Development Goals;
- Reforming the United Nations to make its human rights machinery more effective.

"A small coterie of spoiler countries must not be allowed to hold the UN World Summit hostage and water down the Millennium Development Goals or to scuttle the reform of the UN Human Rights machinery. The international community must not give in to such pressure," said Irene Khan.

Amnesty International is campaigning to stop torture and ill-treatment in the "war on terror". For more information, please go to the campaign home page:

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/stoptorture-index-eng>

Public Document

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