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HUMAN RIGHTS MUST BEGIN AT HOME AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IRISH EU PRESIDENCY

(Dublin/Brussels 12 January 2004) As the Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern prepares to address the European Parliament this week on how Ireland intends to guide the EU through the next six months, Amnesty International is calling for serious improvements in EU human rights policy inside Europe.

Amnesty International's 18-page assessment of EU human rights policies, released today in Brussels and Dublin, includes recommendations to the Irish EU Presidency for more EU supervision of human rights compliance within EU countries, for concrete measures at EU level to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination, for policies that ensure the EU does not abandon its international obligations to protect refugees, and for the protection of victims of human trafficking.

(See document: "Human rights begin at home. Amnesty International's assessment of EU human rights policy. Recommendations to the Irish EU Presidency" available on www.amnesty-eu.org).

"Amnesty International has the impression that the EU human rights machine is running out of steam," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office said at a press conference in Dublin.

"The EU has the ambition and the potential to be the most powerful global force for human rights. We acknowledge there have been achievements in certain areas, but overall there is still too little to show in terms of impact and effectiveness. We are looking to the Irish EU Presidency to inject more energy into the human rights agenda," he said.

"It is not enough for the EU to preach human rights abroad. First and foremost, Europe must look to itself. Amnesty International has detailed serious human rights concerns in most of the existing and prospective EU member states. This is something that must be addressed at EU level as well. Otherwise, the EU's human rights credibility in its international relations will always be called into question."

Among Amnesty International's Recommendations to the Irish EU Presidency:

Internally:

Human rights compliance in EU countries

The Council of Ministers must give a robust and practical response to the Commission's Communication on Article 7 of the Treaty addressing the issue of EU-level accountability for serious breaches of human rights within an EU member state.

Judicial cooperation

Increased judicial cooperation must be underpinned by adequate procedural safeguards. The European Arrest Warrant should be implemented in all states with appropriate human rights guarantees.

Racism and discrimination

There needs to be pressure on member states to transpose the EU Race Directive (which should have been implemented by July 2003) into national laws across the EU.

Asylum

The Irish Presidency should ensure that EU member states do not shift their responsibility for protection of refugees to third countries where adequate levels of protection and durable solutions are not available.

Immigration and borders

All decisions taken to combat illegal immigration should be subject to effective monitoring mechanisms and a human rights impact assessment.

Human trafficking

Efforts to combat trafficking must include human rights protection for victims of trafficking through appropriate legislative measures.

Externally:

The EU and the UN Commission on Human rights

The Irish Presidency should bolster the UNCHR's core function of monitoring, reporting and public scrutiny of situations of gross human rights abuse and further integrate the EU's work on the UNCHR into regular political dialogues with third countries.

Human rights clause in EU association agreements

Human rights concerns should be stressed in political dialogue with all Mediterranean countries in particular, to complement the Commission's efforts to develop National Action Plans on human rights and democratization.

Torture

The Irish Presidency should redouble efforts to implement the EU guidelines on torture. The proposed regulation on trade in torture equipment should be adopted by the Council of Ministers without further delay so that controls are in place by the time of the accession of the ten new member states on 1 May.

Human rights defenders

Welcoming the announcement of guidelines for EU policy on human rights defenders, Amnesty urges the Irish Presidency to invite the EU's Latin American and Caribbean partners to use the opportunity of the May summit in Mexico to put in place a roadmap for the implementation of the principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

European Security Strategy

Human rights responsibility must be made an integral component of crisis management and of long-term engagement in post-conflict resolution.

Arms control

The Irish Presidency is urged to support efforts towards the adoption of an international Arms Trade Treaty by 2006.

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