

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **EU EXPORT BAN ON TORTURE EQUIPMENT: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON EU TO SPEED UP IMPLEMENTATION**

(Brussels 2 December 2003) On the launch today of a major report by Amnesty International on the growing worldwide trade in security equipment which can be used for torture and ill-treatment, the organisation calls on the European Union to take a global lead in this area by urgently implementing its own proposed EU trade ban.

Amnesty International points out that although the European Commission a year ago submitted a proposed Trade Regulation restricting trade in "certain equipment and products which could be used for capital punishment, torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment", the process has apparently become bogged down because of objections from some EU Member States.

Amnesty International's new report "*The Pain Merchants: Security equipment and its use in torture and other ill-treatment*" details the failure of governments worldwide to control the expanding trade in this sort of equipment. There are now 856 companies in 47 countries involved in the manufacture or marketing of weapons described as being "less than lethal" alternatives to firearms, many of which easily lend themselves to torture.

As far as the EU is concerned, the report states that 57 companies in the EU and acceding States (Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, United Kingdom) have offered to sell, distribute, broker or manufacture electro-shock stun weapons between 2000-2003.

"The EU has made the eradication of torture a priority for its human rights policy. Why then is the approval process for its anti-torture trade regulation taking so long?" Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office asked.

Amnesty International called on concerned EU citizens to take part in Amnesty's global internet campaign being launched today, and directed at both the current Italian EU Presidency, and the incoming Irish EU Presidency, to urge them to ensure that a strong regulation is adopted by the Council of Ministers without delay.

"Amnesty International calls on the EU to take a global lead on this issue. The United Nations and some countries trading in this equipment have stated that they are all looking to, and waiting for, the EU to implement this trade regulation, which would be the first of its kind in the world. Hopefully then, countries around the world will follow the EU's example, which would be a major achievement for EU human rights policy," he said.

"EU Member States apparently expect the European Commission to reflect their objections in a new compromise proposal. Amnesty International is worried this might result in the proposal being watered down, rather than strengthened, and that any further delay may mean that the EU will not have any export controls in place for torture and death penalty-related equipment before the accession of the ten new Member States on 1 May next year," Dick Oosting said.

#### Background:

The proposed EU Trade Regulation would ban the trading from Member States to countries outside the EU of equipment designed for capital punishment or torture (including electro-shock belts, leg irons and thumbcuffs) and would require the strict control on trade of security equipment that is deemed to have legitimate uses but that can also lend itself to torture and abuse (including tear gas, electro-shock batons and stun guns.)

#### Timeline:

**December 2002:** European Commission submits its proposal for a Council Regulation "concerning trade in certain equipment and products which could be used for capital punishment, torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".

**March 2003:** COREPER refers the proposal to the Council Working Party dealing with Trade Questions. The CFSP Working Party for Human Rights (COHOM) is invited to comment on the proposal.

**September 2003:** COHOM reportedly comments positively on the proposal.

**Current state of play:**

While the Commission's proposal was reportedly well received by Member States' delegations to the Council Working party for Human Rights, several reservations were reportedly expressed during discussions in the Council Working Party dealing with Trade Questions. The Commission will now have to submit a compromise proposal to the Council.

***The Pain Merchants. Security equipment and its use in torture and other ill-treatment***

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***Amnesty International internet appeal to the Italian and Irish EU Presidencies***

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