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AUSTRALIA: Secretary General of Amnesty International urges Australian government to uphold human rights

Canberra: In an address to the National Press Club today, Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan urged the Australian government to uphold human rights equally at home, as well as abroad.

"Australia is a country, known for its hospitality to refugees, with a good track record of receiving around 12,000 refugees a year. The image of Australia today is less of a carefree, sporting nation, and more of the Tampa and its human cargo, of riots and protests at Woomera, of Australian-funded detention centres on the Pacific islands."

"The time is ripe for the government to take a serious look at alternatives to the ten-year-old policy of detention. The problems associated with the system of mandatory detention will not go away – on the contrary, they could worsen if more creative and constructive thinking does not emerge soon. Closing existing detention centres and opening new ones is not the way forward."

"In a world reeling from the effects of the attacks of 11 September, the need to uphold human rights and humanitarian principles has never been greater."

Ms Khan's visit marks the first time an Amnesty International Secretary General has come to Australia to talk about human rights issues in the country. She will meet Amnesty International members and community organisations in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne, marking International Women's Day (March 8) in Melbourne. Ms Khan will also meet Attorney General Daryl Williams and Immigration and Indigenous Affairs Philip Ruddock in Sydney on Thursday.

*For a full transcript of the Press Club address and Irene Khan's biography
please visit: www.amnesty.org.au*

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