

Indonesia: Concrete steps needed to end torture

The Indonesian government has done little to stop torture, in spite of its stated commitment to ending the practice, Amnesty International said today, as the United Nations Committee Against Torture prepares to examine the country's first periodic report.

Hundreds of cases of torture are reported each year by human rights groups in Indonesia. In Papua and Aceh, torture is commonly employed to punish, intimidate, extract confessions or extort money from suspected supporters of independence movements. In some cases the treatment is so brutal that it ends in death.

"Torture, however, is not confined to supporters of pro-independence movements," Amnesty International said, adding that it has documented cases of torture of criminal suspects and of individuals involved in land and labour disputes.

Torture is carried out by both the military and the police and typically takes the form of kicking, beating with fists and hard objects, burning with cigarettes or matches, slashing with knives or razors, death threats and mock executions, soaking with water including sewerage, mutilation of the genitals, sexual molestation and rape.

"Concrete measures are urgently needed to change both the law and the practice in Indonesia," Amnesty International said. "Explicitly prohibiting torture in the Criminal Code is the first and most basic step which must be taken. It must be immediately followed by sanctions against officials who ignore existing legal safeguards to protect detainees."

Few allegations of torture are investigated and rarely are those responsible brought before the courts. There is no mechanism for the effective and independent investigation of torture allegations, and the judicial system -- riddled with corruption -- is unable to deal adequately with cases of torture or other human rights violations.

"In the absence of an effective and credible mechanism for investigation, or an independent judiciary, there is no avenue through which torture victims can seek redress with any expectation of success," Amnesty International stressed.

"Widespread impunity for torture and other human rights violations in Indonesia ultimately underscores a problem of lack of political will," the organization added. "The authorities in Indonesia have consistently demonstrated a resistance to bringing to justice members of the security forces, particularly those in senior positions, who are accused of committing human rights violations."

"Because the government doesn't take a strong stand against torture or make efforts to prevent it, there effectively exists little or no deterrent to stop the torturers," Amnesty International said.

By signing the Convention against Torture (in 1998) the Indonesian government has committed itself to taking a series of steps such as undertaking legal and judicial reform, improving training and establishing mechanisms of accountability.

Amnesty International is urging the Indonesian government to implement its obligations under the Convention, including:

to condemn publicly all forms of torture and ill-treatment and ensure that the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment is emphasised in the training of law enforcement personnel;

to prohibit by law all acts of torture and ill-treatment, and make these offences punishable by sanctions which reflect the seriousness of the crime;

to investigate promptly and impartially all reports and complaints of torture and ill-treatment;

to bring perpetrators to justice, including exercising universal jurisdiction over acts of torture committed abroad;

to take other effective measures to prevent torture and ill-treatment, including by ensuring that detainees have prompt and regular access to lawyers, relatives and judges.

Background

During the current session, the Committee against Torture, a 10-member body of independent experts, will review the periodic reports of the governments of Indonesia, Israel, Ukraine, Zambia and Benin. The meeting is taking place in Geneva, Switzerland, from 13 to 23 November 2001. Indonesia's report is being examined on 16 and 19 November and the Committee will present its conclusions and recommendations on 22 November.

Amnesty International's researcher on Indonesia will be in Geneva on 15 and 16 November and is available for interviews. Please call the Amnesty International press office on +44 207 413 5566/5729

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>