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PUBLIC STATEMENT

SRI LANKA

Amnesty International joins Committee against Torture call for end of impunity for torturers

Amnesty International today welcomed the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture recommendation that the Sri Lankan Government take firmer action to bring to justice perpetrators of torture.

On the occasion of the examination of Sri Lanka's initial report under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the UN Convention), the UN Committee welcomed the role played by the Supreme Court in awarding compensation to victims of torture, but urged the authorities to bring to justice the perpetrators.

The Sri Lankan Government delegation acknowledged that torture was a problem in the country and that apart from one case against six police officers charged with the torture of one man in Embilipitiya in 1990, no prosecutions had been initiated.

The UN Committee also recommended that the government reviews the definition of torture in Sri Lanka's Convention against Torture Act 1994 to bring it fully in line with the definition in the Convention, and that it also initiates a review of the Emergency Regulations and Prevention of Terrorism Act to ensure their compliance with the UN Convention against Torture. The Committee further recommended that the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka and other mechanisms be strengthened to ensure their impartiality and effectiveness.

In addition, the Committee urged the Sri Lankan Government to make a declaration under Articles 21 and 22 of the UN Convention. This would give private individuals in Sri Lanka the right to lodge complaints regarding violations of the UN Convention Against Torture with the Committee, and allow other states parties the right to declare that Sri Lanka is not fulfilling its obligations under the UN Convention.

The UN General Assembly has declared 26 June 1998 as International Day against Torture. Amnesty International urges the government to use this opportunity to officially recognize the suffering of the thousands of victims of torture in Sri Lanka, by issuing a clear condemnation, announcing measures to stop widespread torture and ill-treatment, and granting redress as recommended by the Committee.

Amnesty International is calling upon the government to commemorate all victims of torture on 26 June of each year -- as suggested by one of the members of the Committee and as welcomed by the Sri Lankan delegation.

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