

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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WANTED: A NEW EU AGENDA FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AMNESTY SETS BENCHMARKS FOR ITALIAN EU PRESIDENCY

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11.30 BRUSSELS TIME, WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE

(Brussels and Rome, 25 June, 2003) At the simultaneous launch in Brussels and Rome today of *Amnesty International's Six-Monthly Assessment of EU Human Rights Policy**, the organization says the European Union is lacking focus on human rights both at home and abroad, and calls for leadership from the Italian government to shape a new EU human rights agenda.

On the eve of Italy assuming the Presidency of the EU, Amnesty sets out 10 recommendations on human rights by which the Italian EU Presidency should be judged. ***(Wanted - a new EU agenda for human rights: Amnesty International six-monthly assessment of EU human rights policy and benchmarks for the Italian Presidency)** available on www.amnesty-eu.org and go to "documents" page.

"Amnesty International's assessment is that the EU is losing its grip on the global human rights agenda while opportunism reigns at home, particularly on issues like asylum and immigration," said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office, speaking at today's launch.

"As EU leaders gather in Washington today for their summit meeting with the US, Amnesty International calls on the EU to show more courage and determination in the face of the human rights challenges confronting it, both at home and abroad."

AMONG THE KEY POINTS OF AMNESTY'S 16-PAGE ASSESSMENT:

EU losing its grip on the global human rights agenda

- **Security versus human rights:** The EU has been unable, if not unwilling, to confront the challenges of insecurity and formulate a coherent response to those violating human rights on the pretext of "fighting terrorism".
- **Lacking impact:** The EU has fallen almost silent or shown itself to be utterly powerless on some of the world's most entrenched human rights crises. Amnesty's assessment underlines that human rights are the vital ingredient that is consistently missing from conflict resolution and outlines steps the EU should take in regard to Afghanistan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Colombia, the DRC, Iraq and Israel/Occupied Territories.
- **No impetus at UN:** At this year's session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the EU concentrated on damage control. The UN Commission failed dismally to do its job of protecting human rights through public scrutiny of situations of gross abuse.
- **Bending to US pressure:** The international community including the EU appears barely able to hold out against relentless US pressure to undermine the International Criminal Court, and is ready to compromise even on evident standards of international law.

"As far as its external policies are concerned, the EU is doing a lot at micro level through political dialogue, cooperation and assistance, but the impact at macro level is negligible and

the big picture remains profoundly distressing," said Dick Oosting.

Reneging on human rights at home

- **Asylum policy driven by control:** the human rights perspective does not feature in the EU's short term and self-interested thinking on asylum.
- **Human rights abused in Europe:** Amnesty International's latest Annual Report lists human rights violations in thirteen of the fifteen EU Member States, including Italy, but the EU remains silent about human rights problems at home.

"While the proposed incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into the new constitutional treaty is hailed as one of the major achievements of the Convention on the Future of Europe, the EU's human rights policy will remain fundamentally flawed as long as it turns a blind eye to human rights violations within Europe's own borders. Accountability is needed at EU level to complement the primary responsibility of member states to protect their citizens," he said.

KEY RECOMMENDATION FOR THE ITALIAN EU PRESIDENCY:

The Italian Presidency must take the lead in shaping a new EU agenda for human rights that empowers the EU to:

- **confront the world's most entrenched human rights crises;**
- **uphold rights protection when countering 'terrorism' and 'illegal immigration';**
- **shape EU accountability for human rights observance within an enlarged Union.**

For further comment/background and interviews:

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