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## **UN Commission on Human Rights: Political Horsetrading Triumphs over Rights Protection**

**Geneva** -- As the 54th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights (the Commission) draws to a close today, Amnesty International criticized the Commission for choosing political compromise over decisive action for victims in countries like Algeria, Indonesia and East Timor, Saudi Arabia and China.

“During its six week session, thousands of people were killed or injured in Algeria, yet the Commission did nothing. If a blind eye is turned to such blatant and often publicized abuses, what hope can victims not in the international spotlight have,” Amnesty International said.

### **Algeria: disgraceful inaction**

Shamefully, despite the appalling human rights tragedy in Algeria, the Commission has once again decided not to act. In the face of the Algerian Government's outright refusal to cooperate with the Commission the European Union, the US and Canada buckled under and eventually admitted to lacking the determination to take the action that was needed.

Even though the deadline for a resolution on Algeria was extended at the last minute, nothing was put on the floor for debate. There was no serious discussion about the desperate need to send an international team to investigate the situation and the plight of the Algerian victims and Member States hid behind a barrage of contemptible excuses to justify their inaction. As posturing went on at the Commission, thousands of people were killed or injured in Algeria.

### **Saudi Arabia: off the hook**

The Commission has deplorably decided to let Saudi Arabia off the hook. Despite the virtual absence of the rule of law in the country, the Commission decided to drop scrutiny of Saudi Arabia's human rights record from its confidential procedure.

### **Indonesia and East Timor: lessons are not learned**

Backing down from a resolution condemning continuing human rights violations in East Timor, governments, including the Australian Government, openly worked with the European Union for a weak statement by the Chairman of the Commission.

According to the statement, Indonesia agrees to invite the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to the country before the next session of the Commission. This development took

place despite the fact that previous commitments and recommendations contained in both Chairman's statements and resolutions at the Commission- including commitments to invite UN human rights theme experts within a particular timeframe - have been ignored by the Indonesian Government.

**China: a deplorable silence**

Scrutiny of China's human rights record was conspicuously absent during the Commission's session. Prior to the session the European Union made public its decision not to table a resolution on China at the Commission. Amnesty International deplores the lack of scrutiny of China's human rights record which has more to do with policy splits between EU member states and trade deals than any significant improvement in the human rights situation in the country.

**Abolition of the death penalty: a step in the right direction**

For the second time in a row the Commission has adopted a resolution calling for a moratorium on the death penalty "with a view to completely abolishing" this practice. Encouragingly, the resolution was sponsored by 65 states, 15 more than the resolution adopted last year. Another positive factor was the decision of the United Kingdom Government to cosponsor the resolution. Last year the UK authorities abstained. The US represented a conspicuously discredited minority by being the only Member State withing the Western group to vote against the resolution. Amnesty International welcomes the adoption of this resolution and hopes that the Commission will build on this achievement at its 55th session.

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**For further information, or to arrange an interview please contact the Amnesty International UN Office in Geneva on: + 41 22 798 2500.**