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## PUBLIC STATEMENT

### AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS TO TAKE CONCRETE MEASURES TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS

On the eve of the Euro-Mediterranean meeting of Foreign Affairs in Stuttgart, Amnesty International reiterates its call for human rights issues to be taken into account in the discussion and the Final Declaration. In particular, the organization is concerned about several human rights issues on both sides of the Mediterranean, including torture and ill-treatment, protection for refugees and respect for the rule of law.

Amnesty International has previously made public its concerns and recommendations on the occasion of the meetings of Malta in April 1997, and Palermo in June 1998, but to date no adequate steps have been taken by the concerned parties to address outstanding human rights issues.

For example, torture and ill-treatment continue to be used against detainees on both sides of the Mediterranean, in total disregard of national laws and international human rights treaties and often under the cover of impunity. The forthcoming Foreign Affairs Ministers' meeting in Stuttgart must not be yet another missed opportunity for human rights. The Final Declaration to be adopted at the end of this meeting should contain provisions for concrete human rights measures.

Amnesty International recommends that all Partnership states should ratify and implement the UN Convention against Torture, and all the partner countries should renew their commitment to ratifying and implementing all international human rights treaties to which they are not yet party and avoid limiting reservations.

Amnesty International notes with great concern that in the European Union and in the southern Mediterranean countries, the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers often falls short of internationally agreed standards.

The Final Declaration should reaffirm the commitment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partners to respect international standards of refugee protection, in particular the principle of non *refoulement*. Enshrined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, this principle prohibits countries from forcibly returning a person to a country where they might be at risk of serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International welcomes the inclusion of human rights clauses in all Association Agreements negotiated between the European Union and each Mediterranean partner. However, Amnesty International is concerned that the human rights situation in the countries concerned has not been seriously discussed between the EU and its partners when association agreements have

been negotiated or signed. In addition, if the human rights clause is to produce concrete improvements in the human rights situation, it needs to be monitored regularly by both parties.

Amnesty International therefore strongly recommends that a provision regarding procedures for monitoring implementation, including the possibility of fact-finding visits, is adopted in the framework of the political dialogue.

Amnesty International reaffirms the importance of an effective judicial system in Euro-Mediterranean countries. The organization is aware that the fight against “terrorism” has been placed high on the agenda of the meeting in Stuttgart. In the Final Declaration, ministers should reaffirm that the fight against “terrorism” must be conducted in full respect of international human rights standards and the rule of law for the entire Euro-Mediterranean region.

**Background**

Since the Euro-Mediterranean summit in Barcelona in November 1995, the 15 members of the European Union have been seeking to sign association agreements with each of its 12 Mediterranean partners to pave the way for a Euro-Med free trade area by 2010. The association agreement contains a clause on human rights protection.

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