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Morocco/WS: Amnesty International delegates to speak about sharp rise in torture in Morocco

An Amnesty International delegation is in Geneva today presenting a briefing to United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) ahead of sessions on 12-13 November in which the Committee will examine Morocco's implementation of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

The delegation has just returned from a research mission to Morocco / Western Sahara (13-22 October) where it met with victims of torture, families of victims, human rights activists and lawyers.

The delegation will focus on the sharp rise in the number of reported cases of torture or ill-treatment in the last two years. Dozens of the recent cases have been of suspected Islamists arrested, questioned and often later tried after being accused of involvement in or planning violent acts over the last two years, including the attacks in Casablanca on 16 May 2003 which resulted in the death of some 45 people.

In some cases, those arrested have been held for up to five and a half months in secret detention, a practice to which political prisoners were frequently subjected between the 1960s and 1990s in Morocco / Western Sahara, but which was thought to have been consigned to the history books.

The delegation will also report on torture practices against Sahrawis arrested for holding views in favour of the independence of Western Sahara, a disputed territory annexed by Morocco in 1975. Those Sahrawis continue to be a target of repression, including torture during interrogation, by the Moroccan authorities.

The Committee against Torture is scheduled to announce its conclusions and recommendations on Morocco on 20 November.

The full text of the briefing is today being made available as a public document *Morocco / Western Sahara: Briefing to the Committee against Torture (November 2003)*(AI Index: 29/011/2003).

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