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EU: Show firmness on Russia's human rights responsibilities

(Brussels, 22 November) The EU must give a stronger human rights message to President Putin, says Amnesty International ahead of the EU-Russia Summit on 24 November. In a new report, released today, ("*Torture and forced 'confessions' in detention*," available at www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International documents the extent to which torture is practised in Russian detention centres.

Corroborated testimonies and medical evidence indicate that torture takes place across Russia. Beatings, electroshocks and even a "rape-room" equipped with metal table and wrist restraints have been reported to Amnesty International, as means to obtain forced "confessions".

Another strategy is to transfer suspects, on the pretext of over-crowding, to temporary detention facilities where inmates reportedly conduct beatings in exchange for privileges. Testimonies gathered from former detainees state that groups of up to six convicts carried out beatings with truncheons and poles.

In 2005 alone, Russian NGOs documented more than 100 cases of torture in only 11 Russian regions. These numbers exclude the North Caucasus where Amnesty International is particularly concerned about the practice of holding detainees *incommunicado* in secret detention facilities.

Basic rights such as the right to legal counsel or medical examination by a doctor of choice are not being implemented and there has been little effective investigation by the General Procuracy.

"The EU must press President Putin to show that he is ready to address these problems and implement change. This is a crucial step at a time when the EU is deepening its engagement with the Russian Federation through the renewal of the Strategic Partnership," said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International EU Office.

In a letter, Amnesty International urged the EU Presidency to take this opportunity to ask Russia to:

- Sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and facilitate the visit of the UN Special Rapporteur on torture as soon as possible;
- Develop standards for the office of the General Procurator to ensure investigations into allegations of torture are prompt, independent and in line with international obligations;
- Ensure detainees have access to legal counsel at all stages as well as a doctor of choice, and that they are brought promptly before a judge.
