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UN: NGOs welcome new treaty to prevent torture

**Amnesty International
The Association for the Prevention of Torture
Human Rights Watch
The International Commission of Jurists**

Joint NGO Press release on the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Amnesty International, the Association for the Prevention of Torture, the International Commission of Jurists and Human Rights Watch, applauded the adoption today of a new treaty designed to prevent torture. Following 10 years of often difficult negotiations, an overwhelming majority of States at the UN General Assembly voted to take practical and concrete steps to eradicate this appalling violation of human rights.

The Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture will help prevent acts of torture before they can occur. This represents a new approach for UN human rights protection. It will establish a system of regular visits to places of detention by an international body of experts, complemented by sustained regular visits conducted by national visiting bodies.

Visits by independent experts, enabled to make concrete recommendations, have proven to be one of the most effective means to prevent torture.

The vast majority of States from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, gave their support to the Optional Protocol. The Optional Protocol was adopted by 104 votes in favour and only 8 against.

Earlier, the UN member States resoundingly defeated a USA proposal that would have effectively denied many developing States the opportunity to join this initiative to prevent torture. The USA and Japan sought to make States who ratify the Optional Protocol solely responsible for the costs of the instrument, rendering effective torture prevention a privilege only for wealthy States. This is contrary to long-standing practice for the funding of all the human rights mechanisms from the UN regular budget.

The Optional Protocol will now be presented for its formal adoption during the plenary session of the UN General Assembly in December and will subsequently be open for signature. The Optional Protocol will enter into force upon the 20th ratification.

Our organisations welcome the strong show of support for the Optional Protocol and urge States

to ratify at the earliest opportunity. We also call for sufficient funding to ensure that this treaty serves its crucial purpose - preventing torture throughout the world.

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