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United Kingdom: Police brutality must be addressed

The call for the creation of a fully fledged independent agency to investigate complaints against police brutality in England and Wales by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (ECPT) should be taken seriously by the UK Government, Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International has been concerned for many years about allegations of ill-treatment and excessive use of force by police officers in the UK and has in the past expressed concern over shortcomings in the investigation of such cases.

The ECPT report strongly criticizes the UK system of dealing with police ill-treatment, which has often resulted in police officers not being brought to justice even when victims have been awarded damages.

In 1998, the United Nations Committee Against Torture, to which Amnesty International submitted a briefing of its concerns, expressed similar criticism of the UK Government. The criticism included the apparent failure to provide for an effective investigative mechanism to deal with allegations of police abuse as well as a failure to report publicly in a timely manner.

Amnesty International welcomes the ECPT recommendation for an independent review to be carried out of those cases in which, over the past two years, there have been successful claims for civil damages/out-of-court settlements for over £10,000, because they are likely to offer prima facie evidence of the nature and gravity of police abuses.

Amnesty International also welcomes the call for the Crown Prosecution Service to give detailed reasons in cases where it is decided that no criminal proceedings should be brought against police officers. However, in the interest of transparency and accountability, the results of police investigations into allegations of abuses by law enforcement officials should also be made available for scrutiny.

"British Government inaction on police abuse of power has been criticised by international treaty bodies on several occasions; so far the Government has failed to act on the recommendations put forward," Amnesty International said.

"How many more reports will it take before the Government acts to bring police practice in line with international standards?" asked the organization.

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