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Nigeria: Government to be quizzed on human rights record at UN

As the Nigerian government prepares to be quizzed over its human rights record by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, Amnesty International called on the government to take its human rights responsibilities seriously and implement any recommendations coming from the Council as quickly as possible.

A Nigerian government delegation will be examined at 14.30 on Monday, 9 February in a three-hour session in Geneva. The Nigerian representatives will be asked to explain their record in areas such as torture, illegal killings by security agents, the death penalty and prison conditions.

Amnesty International has provided the UN Human Rights Council with an alternative report to the one being presented by the Nigerian delegation, in which the organization highlights some of the major areas of human rights concern in the country, with recommendations on how to tackle them.

“We hope that the Nigerian government will use this unique opportunity to focus on the key human rights challenges facing the country and take seriously any recommendations as to how they can improve shortfalls,” said Aster van Kregten, Amnesty International’s Nigeria researcher.

In its report to the Human Rights Council, the Nigerian government claims that the death penalty is rarely applied, and that this is “tantamount to the adoption of self-imposed moratorium”. The reality is that at least 22 executions have been carried out in the country in the last ten years — including at least seven in 2006. At least 40 child offenders remain on death row, in contravention of international human rights standards.

Amnesty International has serious concerns that many of those on death row may be innocent, due to problems linked to unfair trials, inadequate investigations and claims of torture being used to extract confessions. Amnesty International urged the government to make this moratorium on the death penalty official, by adopting legislation calling for an immediate halt to all executions.

The Nigerian government claims in its report to the Human Rights Council that torture is not widespread in Nigeria. Information from Amnesty International and Nigerian human rights organizations indicates that this is far from true: Amnesty International has documented many cases of suspects who were tortured by the police and seen numerous cases of scars, bruises, and dried blood, indicating beatings serious enough to require medical care. Prisoners also told Amnesty International that they had witnessed suspects being tortured to death or executed by the police.

“There is an absolute and unconditional prohibition of torture and ill-treatment in international law and accepted moral standards. It degrades victims and dehumanizes the torturer. It is imperative that Nigeria stamps out this practice immediately.”

Over the years, the government has itself come up with recommendations on how to improve human rights in the areas of torture, access to justice and the death penalty. Unfortunately, few of these recommendations have been implemented. Legislation drafted to address these concerns has been on hold for years in the National Assembly.

“A country’s engagement with international review mechanisms such as the UN Human Rights Council is always positive,” acknowledged Aster van Kregten. “However, for this engagement to truly have a positive outcome, the Nigerian government has to look at the human rights problems facing Nigeria with a critical eye, with a view to making real improvements for the people of Nigeria.”

Background

The Universal Periodic Review -- or UPR -- is the first-ever UN mechanism to look at the human rights records of all countries. During the current session, scheduled to run until 13 February, the UN Human Rights Council will examine the governments of 16 countries on their human rights records.

Countries scheduled for examination this month include China, the Russian Federation, Cuba, Mexico and Nigeria.

To see a copy of Amnesty International’s submission to the UN Human Rights Council with recommendations on how to improve the human rights situation, please click [here](#).

Please click on the following links to see recent, detailed Amnesty International reports regarding Nigeria’s [criminal justice system](#) and the [death penalty](#).