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## **Ecuador first to ratify new UN mechanism to enforce economic, social and cultural rights**

Amnesty International urges other countries to follow Ecuador's example and ratify a new UN mechanism that will provide access to justice for everyone whose economic, social and cultural rights are violated and who is denied an effective remedy in their own countries.

Ecuador is the first country in the world to ratify the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights which allows individuals and groups within the country to seek justice from the United Nations should these rights - which include the rights to adequate housing, food, water, health, work, social security and education - be violated by their government.

"Access to justice is an essential right for victims of all human rights violations," said Widney Brown, Amnesty International's Senior Director of International Law and Policy. "We encourage all countries to follow Ecuador's positive example and ratify within the shortest possible time."

The Optional Protocol will enable people denied their human rights to have their complaints heard in front of an independent, international panel of experts. The decisions made by this new mechanism are likely to influence decisions of national and regional courts around the world.

"States that ratify the Optional Protocol will establish a vital tool for people, in particular for those living in poverty, to hold their governments accountable," said Widney Brown. "They should also follow through on this commitment by strengthening national mechanisms for the enforcement of economic, social and cultural rights."

The Optional Protocol was adopted by the UN General Assembly by consensus on December 10 2008 and was opened for ratification in September 2009. The complaint mechanism will become operational after 10 countries ratify the Optional Protocol.

In addition to Ecuador, 31 countries have signed the Optional Protocol, indicating their intention to ratify but ratification is necessary to make the Optional Protocol legally binding. To-date Ecuador is the only country to have ratified the protocol.

### Notes to Editors

- Amnesty International is a member of the NGO Coalition for an Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and has been campaigning for the last six years for an Optional Protocol.
- The 32 States that have signed the Optional Protocol include: Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium,

Bolivia, Chile, Congo, Ecuador, El Salvador, Finland, France, Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Italy, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Paraguay, Portugal, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Timor-Leste, Togo, Ukraine and Uruguay.

- Economic, social and cultural rights have historically been neglected and given less emphasis than civil and political rights. States agreed at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights that 'The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis'. The Optional Protocol is a tangible development towards this end.
- Support for the Optional Protocol is part of Amnesty International's Demand Dignity campaign which aims to end the human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty. The campaign will mobilise people all over the world to demand that governments, corporations and others who have power listen to the voices of those living in poverty and recognise and protect their rights. For more information visit <http://www.amnesty.org/en/demand-dignity>