

AI Index: PRE01/249/2010  
22 July 2010

## **UK justice proposal would lead to impunity for war crimes and torture**

Amnesty International is urging the UK parliament to reject a government proposal that would hamper arrest warrants being issued for suspected war criminals and torturers visiting the country, warning that it could lead to the UK being seen as a safe haven for international criminals.

The UK Ministry of Justice proposed today to give the Director of Public Prosecutions veto power over private arrest warrants requested against alleged international criminals who visit the UK, claiming that the system is open to abuse by people trying to make political points on the basis of flimsy evidence.

“This proposal is unnecessary and sends the wrong signals. The UK government is trying to make it more difficult for those suspected of war crimes to be arrested on British soil” said Christopher Keith Hall, Amnesty International Senior Legal Adviser.

“The current procedure allows victims of crimes under international law to act quickly against those suspected of them, who could otherwise enter and leave the UK before police and prosecutors could act. It should remain unchanged” said Christopher Keith Hall.

Under current UK law, victims of war crimes, torture and hostage-taking can mount private prosecutions against suspected perpetrators in any country, regardless of nationality or where the crime was committed, under the international rule of universal jurisdiction.

Amnesty International rejects claims that the existing system has been subject to abuse.

“Magistrates have carefully screened each request for such a warrant, refused some and issued others which met strict standards of evidence. There have been no examples - and the UK government has cited none - where magistrates have issued arrest warrants based on 'flimsy evidence'” said Christopher Keith Hall.

Victims already need to meet a high threshold of evidence in order to obtain an arrest warrant.

Amnesty International warned that the UK government has in the past refused to prosecute those suspected of torture, such as former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet.