

AI Index: PRE 01/312/2008
09 December 2008

60th Anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Time to Deliver

Amnesty International today called on governments to make the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) a time for action not just for celebration.

“The senseless killings in Mumbai, thousands of people fleeing the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, hundreds of thousands more trapped in dire conditions in Darfur, Gaza and northern Sri Lanka and a global economic recession that could push millions more into poverty creates a burning platform for action on human rights,” said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

Against this backdrop to the 60th anniversary of the UDHR, Amnesty International warned that the world faces multiple challenges.

Denouncing the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, Amnesty International cautioned governments not to rollback human rights in the name of security. “Governments have a duty to protect people from terrorism, but detaining people indefinitely without charge or trial, condoning or conducting torture and eroding the rule of law does not make the world a safer place,” said Irene Khan.

Noting the impact of the global economic crisis on poor countries, which risks throwing millions more people into poverty, Amnesty International called on governments to protect economic and social rights with as much vigour as civil and political rights.

“The gift of the UDHR is universality and indivisibility. Human rights are universal – every person is born free and equal in rights and dignity. Human rights are indivisible – all rights, whether economic, social, civil, political or cultural – are equally important and there is no hierarchy of rights,” said Irene Khan.

“Despite progress in many areas in the past decades, injustice, inequality and impunity persist in too many parts of the world. The real problem is that governments make promises and adopt laws but fail to deliver.”

“The time has come for governments to set right six decades of human rights failures and deliver on their promises.”

Notes to Editors:

Six decades of human rights successes include:

International human rights treaties and national laws.

Recognition of rights of women and children.

Creation of the International Criminal Court and prosecutions for war crimes and crimes against humanity by

international tribunals and some national courts.

Establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the UN and in some countries, national human rights commissions.

End of capital punishment in more than two-thirds of the world.

Progress towards control of arms.

Strong civil society support for human rights, including world-wide network of human rights defenders and human rights organizations.

Six decades of human rights failures include:

Massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law in armed conflicts

Increasing targeting of civilians by armed groups and terrorists.

Violence against women and children, including recruitment of child soldiers.

Denial of economic and social rights to millions living in poverty.

Corrupt and unfair judicial systems in many countries.

Use of torture and other forms of ill-treatment

Denial of rights to refugees and migrants

Attacks on activists, journalists and human rights defenders

Suppression of dissent in many countries.

Discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender and identity.