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## **Africa: Torture is rife across the region**

*At a press conference in Nairobi, Kenya, to mark the launch of the Campaign against Torture in the African region, Amnesty International said that torture is widespread across Africa from Cote d'Ivoire to Zimbabwe.*

*"Torture is evident in Africa in a variety of different contexts -- in police stations, on the street, in the home and in conflict zones. Anyone can be a victim – criminal suspects, innocent bystanders, political activists, human rights defenders, women and children. No one, no matter who they are or where they are, should be subjected to such inhumanity," Amnesty International said.*

*Although police officers are responsible for upholding the law, they are most often the torturers. Police brutality is common throughout the region. People have died in custody as a result of torture in many countries, from Cameroon to Equatorial Guinea.*

*In South Africa police continue to resort to methods of investigation used in the apartheid era, despite the prohibition of torture in the Constitution. Zweli Kenneth Ndlozi was taken from his home in Soweto in September 1998 after being accused of involvement in the theft of firearms. Two days later he was found dead hanging in a police cell. A post mortem revealed cigarette burns and a severe blow to his head. More than 200 deaths in custody were reported in 1998.*

*Not all police brutality occurs in custody. In Zambia in August 1997, hundreds of heavily armed paramilitary police officers beat*

peaceful protesters and uninvolved passers by with batons and fired tear gas canisters. Witnesses said that two protesters were beaten to death.

Government forces and militias in situations of armed conflict often use torture. Women are particularly vulnerable to rape as they are seen as "spoils of war". Rebel forces have used an unprecedented scale of mutilation and rape in nine years of armed conflict in Sierra Leone: more than 90 per cent of women and girls abducted by rebel forces are believed to have been raped.

Children are also the victims of torture in armed conflict. Many child soldiers are forced to fight through torture and intimidation. In northern Uganda the Lord's Resistance Army has abducted thousands of boys and girls. Soon after they are seized they are forced to take part in killing and girls are held as sexual slaves.

Although torture is illegal under international law, some forms of it are legally sanctioned under domestic law in some African countries. In the last three years amputations have taken place in Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan, and floggings and corporal punishment took place in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan and Somalia. Only 23 African countries have ratified the Convention against Torture.

During the year-long campaign, Amnesty International will be mobilizing its membership in Africa and throughout the world, and working together with other organizations to change public and official attitudes to torture. It will be calling on Africa's governments to take real steps to prevent torture, overcome impunity and address discrimination.

For a full copy of Amnesty International's launch report, visit [www.stoptorture.org](http://www.stoptorture.org)

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