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SOUTH AFRICA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL SUPPORTS CALL FOR PUBLIC ROLE IN TRUTH COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS

Amnesty International supports the call made today by South African human rights and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for an appointment process which will ensure the selection of the highest quality candidates for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The process must be open and the criteria for selection fully explicit, to avoid the kind of controversy which has clouded recent appointments of the Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International said.

If the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to be accepted as credible and capable of achieving its vital objectives, including the thorough investigation and documentation of past gross human rights violations, the commissioners must be selected by a process which raises public confidence and ensures that the commissioners have been chosen on the basis of their demonstrated commitment to impartial human rights advocacy.

In its submission in January 1995 to the Justice Committee, Amnesty International expressed concern that the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Bill "[did] not provide a sufficiently transparent appointment process, which would seem a vital necessity for a body which must be widely accepted as impartial, if it is to accomplish its fundamental objectives".

Amnesty International remains concerned that the final version of the legislation passed by parliament simply obliges President Mandela to appoint the commissioners in consultation with the cabinet only.

Accordingly Amnesty International joins with South African NGOs today in calling for the names of nominees to be made available for public scrutiny, and for candidates to be involved in public hearings on their suitability for appointment. In addition, Amnesty International recommends that the president's call for nominations should be publicized as widely as possible and involve consultations with human rights, legal and other appropriate bodies.

While these recommendations may create delays, ultimately the Commission's fundamental objectives will not be achieved if reasonable doubt remains as to the credibility of the appointments. Such an outcome could only cause great harm to the cause of human rights in South Africa.

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