

31 August 2001

AI Index ASA 12/004/2001 - News Service Nr. 154

News Flash

Tampa's asylum-seekers: Australia must fulfil its international obligations

Amnesty International has today sent letters to the chairpersons of the UN Committee against Torture and the UN Human Rights Committee expressing its extreme concern about reports that the asylum-seekers on the Norwegian ship the Tampa, currently in Australian territorial waters, are being denied the means to contact lawyers so that they can make petitions to the Australian courts or to any international mechanism to protect their human rights.

The letters make clear that Amnesty International believes the Australian government has effective control and jurisdiction over the asylum-seekers, as the Tampa is in Australian territorial waters, and is under the control of armed Australian troops.

The organization's main concerns are:

- * that those on the Tampa seeking asylum may be subjected to refoulement to a country where they may be at risk of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.*

- * that conditions on the ship are deteriorating and that there may not be access to adequate medical care, particularly for the pregnant women and children who are reportedly on board.*

BACKGROUND

Amnesty International asks the Committee against Torture to make use of the powers conferred upon it by Article 19 of the Convention against Torture to request a special report from Australia on how it is protecting the rights of the people on the Tampa not to be subjected to torture or cruel , inhuman or degrading treatment.

Amnesty International is also asking the Human Rights Committee to make use of similar powers conferred on it by Article 40(1)(b) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to remind Australia of its obligations under international human rights law.

\ENDS

public document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>