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## News Advisory

### HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE EXAMINES COUNTRIES' RECORD

The human rights records of Ukraine, Latvia, Russia, United Kingdom and Sri Lanka will be examined by the Human Rights Committee meeting in Geneva, which begins today 10 July.

The Human Rights Committee, composed of 18 individual experts, monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). States have to report to the Committee within one year of becoming a party to the ICCPR and every five years thereafter.

Amnesty International researchers will be available for interviews on the days that each country's human rights record is examined. Please call them for additional information.

UKRAINE: Appearing 11, 12 July Contact: Nicola Duckworth at (44) 171-413-5669

One of Amnesty International's main concerns in Ukraine is the continuing use of the death penalty, with figures that put Ukraine among the countries with the highest annual numbers of executions in the world. Official statistics issued by the Ministry of Justice in May 1995 show that during the previous year 143 people were sentenced to death and 60 people were executed, while only two people had their death sentences commuted.

Furthermore, the use of the death penalty in Ukraine is still surrounded by secrecy: authorities are reluctant to provide full statistics, in compliance with international recommendations, and places and procedures of execution are considered state secrets.

LATVIA: Appearing 12, 14 July Contact: Mike Butler at (44) 171-413-5687

Amnesty International's current concerns in the Republic of Latvia are the continued detention of approximately 100 asylum-seekers and the retention of the death penalty - at least two prisoners are currently under sentence of death. Amnesty International is urging the Latvian authorities to ratify the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and to ratify Protocol 6 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention) concerning the abolition of the death penalty.

RUSSIA: Appearing 17, 18 July Contact: Nicola Duckworth at (44) 171-413-5669

Since Russian troops entered the Chechen Republic in December 1994 around 1,500 Russian soldiers and an unknown number of Chechen fighters have died, and estimates of civilian deaths range from the thousands to the tens of thousands. Over 300,000 people have been displaced. These tragic statistics of conflict have been accompanied by numerous reports of a range of human rights violations. Within the framework of Amnesty International's mandate, issues the organization has repeatedly approached the Russian authorities about in connection with the conflict include:

- \* allegations of widespread beatings, torture and other ill-treatment in detention;
- \* reports that civilians, including women and children, have been deliberately and unlawfully killed;
- \* continued failure to implement the right to a civilian alternative to compulsory military service for conscientious objectors, recognized in the Russian Constitution; and
- \* parliamentary attempts to widen the scope of the death penalty.

**UNITED KINGDOM:** Appearing 20, 21 July      Contact: Halya Gowan at (41)22-7-982 500

Amnesty International's concerns about human rights violations within the UK concern laws, procedures and practices of law enforcement officials which have led to human rights violations and which the organization believes are not in conformity with international standards. In particular Amnesty International is concerned about the government's failure to investigate independently and fully serious allegations of human rights violations; to make public the results of internal investigations; and to bring the perpetrators of human rights violations to justice.

Although the UK is party to the ICCPR and the European Convention, it has not incorporated the rights, as recognized in these treaties, into UK legislation. Furthermore the UK has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR which would allow individuals to submit complaints to the UN Human Rights Committee.

**SRI LANKA:** Appearing 20, 21 July      Contact: Ingrid Massage at (44) 171-413-5650

A number of encouraging steps have been taken to protect human rights since the new government came to power in Sri Lanka in August 1994, and since the resumption of hostilities in the northeast of the country between the security forces and members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the security forces have to date refrained from resorting to large-scale human rights violations as frequently had been reported in the past.

Amnesty International remains concerned, however, that certain provisions in the Emergency Regulations (ERs) and Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) continue to provide a ready context for deaths in custody, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions as borne out by the large-scale occurrence of such violations in the recent past. Both the ERs and PTA provide the security forces with wide powers to arrest suspected opponents of the government and detain them *incommunicado* without charge or trial for long periods. Amnesty International hopes that the government will use the opportunity of the Human Rights Committee hearing to review both laws and bring them fully in line with the ICCPR.

For any further information about Amnesty International material on these countries, please call the organization's Press Office at the International Secretariat at (44) 171 413-5566.