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MIDDLE EAST: SHARM AL-SHAYKH PARTICIPANTS MUST NOT SELL OUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NAME OF FIGHTING "TERRORISM"

As leaders and representatives of countries in America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East meet at Sharm al-Shaykh in Egypt for a summit to oppose "terrorism", Amnesty International appeals to them to ensure that human rights are not left off the agenda.

"There is a grave danger that human rights violations may be condoned by the international community in the name of fighting 'terrorism'," Amnesty International said today.

"States frequently offer 'state security' or 'the fight against terrorism' as an excuse for violating human rights."

"We call on the participants of the summit to recognize that human rights must not be sacrificed in the name of security; on the contrary sustained peace and security can only be obtained by implementing human rights," the human rights organization said.

Amnesty International opposes unreservedly the killing of civilians by armed opposition groups. Governments have a duty to protect the lives and safety of all those living under their jurisdiction and they have a right and a duty to bring to justice the perpetrators of these attacks.

However, governments, in protecting their people from attacks on life or liberty, should respect international human rights standards.

In Algeria killings and other abuses by armed opposition groups have been met by government human rights violations including extrajudicial executions, torture and "disappearances". The civilian population has been held hostage in a cycle of violence in which 50,000 people have died. In Egypt, Israel and the Occupied Territories scores of civilians have been killed by armed opposition groups; to combat these groups thousands of suspected government opponents have been rounded up and torture is systematic.

Yet, according to international human rights instruments such as the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) the individual's inherent rights to life and not to be tortured cannot be derogated from even "in time of public emergency which threatens the life of a nation".

"Peace and security can only be achieved by determined respect for international human rights standards and the fundamental principles of humanitarian law," Amnesty International said. "We call on the countries participating at the Sharm al-Shaykh conference to reinforce the rule of law and respect for human dignity by strengthening their commitment to human rights standards, and ensuring that no measures are taken which may undermine them."

BACKGROUND

The "Summit of the Peacemakers" at Sharm al-Shaykh was called in response to suicide bombings in Israel by armed Islamist groups which killed 58 people. Due to meet on 13 March

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1996 it will be chaired by President Husni Mubarak of Egypt and President Bill Clinton of the USA and attended by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali and a number of heads of states and governments in the Middle East and Europe.

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