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PRESS RELEASE

Amnesty International: Acceptability of torture highest in India & China

- Amnesty International has reported on torture or other ill-treatment in 141 countries over the past five years
- New global survey of more than 21,000 people in 21 countries across every continent reveals fear of torture exists in all these countries
- Nearly half of respondents fear torture if taken into custody
- More than 80% want strong laws to protect them from torture
- More than a third believe torture can be justified

In a number of Asia-Pacific countries the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is routine – and accepted by many as a legitimate response to high levels of crime.

The Survey found that support for international rules against torture is weakest in **India**, Argentina, Mexico, Nigeria and Peru – less than three quarters of people agree that international rules are necessary.

Shockingly, 74 per cent respondents in **India** (with China- the highest numbers in any of the countries polled) feel that torture can sometimes be justified to gain information that may protect the public.

Torture is rife across the Asia-Pacific region, with China and North Korea among the worst offenders and a host of other governments betraying promises to stamp it out, Amnesty International said as it launched its latest global campaign, *Stop Torture* .

“Torture is a fact of life in countries across Asia. The problem isn’t limited to a few rogue states, but is endemic throughout the region,” said Richard Bennett, Amnesty International’s Asia-Pacific Director.

“Asian countries must stop paying lip service to their commitment to end torture. Signing up to the international treaties is important but not enough. It must be backed up with concrete action.”

The two-year campaign, *Stop Torture* , launches with a new media briefing, *Torture in 2014: 30 Years of Broken Promises*, which provides an overview of the use of torture in the world today.

“The shocking fact that so many people fear torture– in some countries the majority of those polled - should spur authorities across Asia-Pacific into meaningful action by taking concrete steps to eradicate this horrific human rights violation,” said Richard Bennett.

Amnesty International has reported on torture or other forms of ill-treatment in at least 141 countries from every region of the world over the past five years – virtually every country in which it works.

In 2014, thirty years after the UN adopted the 1984 Convention Against Torture – which commits all states parties to combatting the abuse - Amnesty International observed at least 23 Asia-Pacific countries still torturing or ill-treating. Given the secretive nature of the abuse, the true number is likely to be higher.

Torture is used by governments against a range of individuals across Asia-Pacific. It is used to force confessions or to silence activists in countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. Torture is used to extort money in places such as Myanmar and Nepal, where poor and marginalised people are unable to bribe their way out of being tortured.

A worldwide Globescan survey commissioned alongside the briefing for the launch found nearly half (44%) of respondents – from 21 countries across every continent - fear they would be at risk of torture if taken into custody in their country.

Measures such as the criminalisation of torture in national legislation, opening detention centres to independent monitors, and video recording interrogations have all led to a decrease in the use of torture in those countries taking their commitments under the Convention Against Torture seriously.

Very few countries in Asia-Pacific, however, have put in place effective mechanisms to prevent the use of torture, and others are failing to implement the mechanisms properly.

Amnesty International has documented various forms of torture and other ill-treatment used in different countries across the Asia Pacific region, ranging from North Korea's brutal labour camps, to Australia's off-shore processing centres for asylum seekers, or Japan's death rows – where prisoners are kept in isolation, sometimes for decades. Impunity for torturers and denial of justice and reparations to victims are the norm across the region.

- Justice is out of reach for most torture survivors in **the Philippines**. A secret detention facility was recently discovered where police officers abused detainees “for fun”. Police officers reportedly spun a “wheel of torture” to decide how to torture prisoners. Media coverage led to an internal investigation and some officers being dismissed, but Amnesty International is calling for a thorough and impartial investigation which will lead to the prosecution in court of the officers involved. Most acts of police torture remain unreported and torture survivors continue to suffer in silence.
- Torture and other ill-treatment are officially illegal in **China**, but in practice beatings, electrocutions, forced injection of drugs and the denial of medical treatment are regularly used to intimidate and punish dissidents or ordinary criminals. China last year announced the closure of its notorious “Re-education Through Labour” camps, but the change has been mostly cosmetic with authorities simply using new forms of detention to arbitrarily hold and torture dissidents.
- In **Pakistan** torture is frequently practiced by police, intelligence services and the army, in particular in the conflict-ridden Tribal Areas or Balochistan. Amnesty International has received report of torture used on human rights defenders, lawyers and journalists among others. Reporter Ali Chishti is one such case – he was picked up on 30 August 2013 by a police mobile team and driven to a house where he was repeatedly beaten, before simply being dumped in the road. He registered a complaint with police but no one has been brought to justice for his abduction or torture.
- Authorities in **Sri Lanka** still routinely torture detainees. In 2012 at least five people died as a result of torture and police brutality; Sri Lanka's National Human Rights Commission registered 86 complaints of torture in the first three months of 2013 alone. The government makes liberal use of a draconian anti-terror law to detain people arbitrarily for long periods.

Amnesty International is calling on governments in Asia-Pacific to put in place protective mechanisms to prevent and punish torture – such as impartial medical examinations, prompt access to lawyers and courts, independent checks on places of detention, effective investigations of torture allegations, the prosecution of suspects and proper redress for victims.

“Thirty years after the adoption of the UN Convention against Torture, it is well overdue that governments in Asia Pacific stepped up to their responsibilities to stop torture. Systemic legal and practical safeguards to prevent and punish torture must be put in place and adhered to consistently across the region,” said Richard Bennett.

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