

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **UN Commission on Human Rights: Time for concrete action**

The time has come for the UN's highest body on human rights to move from rhetoric to concrete action, Amnesty International said in advance of the 59th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights which is due to begin on 17 March.

"Since its creation the Commission has played an important role in the promotion and protection of human rights. Yet it has a less honourable record of political and economic interests triumphing over action against human rights violations," said Claudio Cordone, Senior Director for International Law and Organizations

One of the key issues for this year's session will be the review of the Commission's working methods. Amnesty International has made submission focusing on the Commission's special procedures and its membership. Although Libya chairing the Commission has dominated media headlines, Amnesty International believes that the key issue is how the Commission can best promote and protect human rights.

"The protection of human rights begins at home. Membership of the Commission is a privilege that carries responsibilities -- especially of those states which comprise its Bureau," Claudio Cordone said.

Amnesty International has written to the Libyan authorities and the other members of the Commission's Bureau (Australia, Croatia, Peru and Sri Lanka), urging them to use their term to ratify key human rights treaties, and to co-operate with the thematic special rapporteurs, including by issuing them with an open, standing invitation to visit their country.

The clampdown on human rights after 11 September 2001 remains one of the most pressing human rights concerns. Measures taken by states in response to real or perceived terrorist threats, both before and after 11 September, have long had serious human rights implications, including a negative long-term effect on the peaceful and non-violent exercise of human rights.

"Last year's withdrawal of the resolution on human rights and counter-terrorism sent a devastating signal that the UN's main human rights body felt unable to address the most pressing human rights issue," Claudio Cordone declared.

Since last year's session of the Commission, the UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution

on human rights and counter terrorism.

"The General Assembly's resolution sends a strong message to the Commission to further strengthen international protection of human rights in the context of counter-terrorism measures by states," Claudio Cordone said.

"The Commission must seize the initiative and establish a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to monitor the impact of security legislation and counter-terrorism measures on human rights."

Another pressing issue that the Commission will address is Iraq. Amnesty International has been calling on the UN Security Council to seriously consider the likely effects of military action on the overall human rights and humanitarian situation of the Iraqi population.

"The protection of the human rights of the people of Iraq must be the primary consideration of anyone planning military action. It is worrying that too little serious attention has been given to the human rights and humanitarian situation in Iraq. The deployment of human rights monitors -- which the Commission has called for since 1993 -- is essential," Claudio Cordone said.

Amnesty International is also urging the Commission to take action to remedy the human rights situation in Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel and the Occupied Territories, Nepal and the Russian Federation/Chechnya.

"In the face of possible conflict in Iraq, it is essential that other countries where serious human rights violations are committed are not forgotten," Claudio Cordone stated.

In addition, Amnesty International is calling for action on a number of thematic concerns, including abolition of the death penalty; support for an Optional Protocol on economic, social and cultural rights; and increased protection for the human rights of refugees and asylum-seekers.

"This Commission must demonstrate that its mandate to promote and protect human rights is more important than the political and economic self interests of individual member states," Claudio Cordone concluded.

**Amnesty International's electronic press kit for the Commission is available on:  
<http://www.web.amnesty.org/mavp/av.nsf/pages/UNCHR>.**

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