

1200 hrs gmt Monday 23 March 1992

CSCE: AI CALLS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND OPENNESS

The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) should remember its old commitments as it takes on new challenges, said Amnesty International.

"As the CSCE searches for a long-term leadership role in the new Europe it should not forget that human rights protection is an essential part of its function," said Amnesty International.

The CSCE is about to start its fourth major Follow-Up Meeting since the original conference in 1975, popularly known as Helsinki II. On the agenda are all aspects of CSCE concern, including human rights, security, environmental and economic issues.

Helsinki II is to develop new ways for the CSCE to deal with crises and conflict in Europe, and in recent months the organization has been particularly concerned with events in Yugoslavia and Nagorno-Karabakh. "It is not entirely clear how human rights monitoring fits into this vision of the CSCE as a peacemaker," said Amnesty International. "We hope that CSCE will not only be concerned with crisis management and conflict prevention but will also develop its role to ensure the full implementation of human rights guarantees."

All 48 members of the CSCE have voluntarily agreed to abide by a wide range of human rights commitments, such as guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary, protecting the rights of prisoners and permitting foreign observers to attend trials - fundamental rights which must be safeguarded if the rule of law is to prevail in Europe.

"As it refines its institutions and procedures, Helsinki II should not forget to ensure that all members implement these human rights commitments, particularly those formulated at human rights conferences in Copenhagen and Moscow," said Amnesty International.

The human rights organization also urged the CSCE to fulfil the promise of the human rights conferences held in each of the past three years to move towards greater openness of the CSCE process and involvement of organizations outside government.

"Perhaps when CSCE started, at the height of the cold war, governments could justify meeting in private," said the worldwide human rights organization. "But if the CSCE is to be credible and relevant in the new Europe it must change its working methods. It has to develop a more open working relationship with individuals and organizations outside of government."

The new human rights process will be discussed in Helsinki largely behind closed doors. Tomorrow the meeting of the foreign ministers of all 48 CSCE states will set the tone for the next three months. Amnesty International calls on them to show the seriousness of their previous promises to involve non-governmental organizations in a meaningful way by opening up at least some of the subsidiary working bodies - where the real debate of reform proposals goes on - which currently meet behind closed doors.

"However, it's not just a question of access to meetings. Non-governmental organizations must be invited to contribute directly and substantively to the CSCE intergovernmental bodies dealing with human rights," said AI.

"These organizations can help the CSCE work more effectively. They can give the CSCE information on human rights in member countries, provide expertise on those issues and can help publicise the work of the CSCE. But how can they do this if they don't know what is going on and are not given the opportunity to contribute?"

Helsinki II will finalise a major overhaul of the CSCE process. Amnesty International hopes that reform will reflect the spirit of openness and consultation in the new Europe and will consolidate the steps already taken to safeguard human rights in all 48 countries.

EMBARGOED FOR 1200 HRS GMT MONDAY 23 MARCH 1992