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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS TO BE CENTRAL IN  
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN SUMMIT

BARCELONA -- On the eve of a summit of 27 European, Middle East and North Africa heads of state, Amnesty International urged that human rights should be central to any agreement on security and cooperation in the region.

In a memorandum to the heads of state, the human rights organization highlighted the need for action on torture and ill-treatment, treatment of refugees and asylum-seekers and public disclosure of all military, security or police transfers in the region.

The aim of the meeting, involving 15 European and 12 Middle East and North Africa heads of state, is to establish a new long-term partnership, and Amnesty International urged the governments to recognize the integral nature of human rights to the issues being discussed.

In particular, the organization highlighted the commitment made by governments at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 in the Vienna Declaration that: "all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis."

While the promotion of economic growth will be likely be high on the agenda of the partnership, Amnesty International stressed that economic development does not automatically lead to an improvement in human rights. The increasing phenomenon of racism and ill-treatment of foreigners, minorities and asylum-seekers within the European Union also shows that a high Gross National Product level does not automatically imply respect for human rights.

As highlighted in recent Amnesty International reports, state agents in some countries on both sides of the Mediterranean commit torture and ill-treatment, and in its memorandum the organization urges the participating governments to take practical steps to eradicate torture and ill-treatment. Specifically, Amnesty International is calling on the partnership states to ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the treatment of asylum-seekers and refugees, and notes that in the European Union as in Mediterranean countries, asylum procedures fall short of minimum standards in certain crucial respects particularly in expedited procedures. Amnesty International appeals to the partnership states to undertake the negotiation

of a binding agreement which clearly establishes minimum procedural standards in asylum procedures.

Amnesty International also calls upon governments of the European Union and Mediterranean countries to ensure that any readmission agreements they reach amongst themselves include guarantees that asylum-seekers and refugees will be granted effective and durable protection against return to a country where they are at risk of being persecuted.

One main objective of the Mediterranean Partnership will be to ensure peace and security in the region through a set of confidence-building measures. In order to ensure that military, security and police transfers are not used to commit grave human rights violations or indiscriminate killings of civilians in the region, Amnesty International calls on the partnership governments to publicly disclose such transfers in advance. Partnership states should commit themselves to forwarding the information required for the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms, as well as giving fuller and more precise descriptions of the arms registered. They should also jointly exert pressure for the inclusion of small arms and light weapons -- those used most frequently to commit human rights violations -- in the UN Register .

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