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YEMEN: SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS CONTINUE DESPITE GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE THEIR PROTECTION.

There is a huge gap between the Yemeni Government's commitment to uphold international human rights and the reality on the ground, said Derek Evans, Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International, on his recent return from Yemen where he led an Amnesty International delegation.

During its visit, from 1 to 7 July 1996, the delegation held discussions with ministers and other government officials, representatives of political parties and local human rights organizations, members of parliament, members of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission, as well as women lawyers and women representatives, judges, journalists, and victims of human rights violations.

The talks were based on an extensive memorandum sent to the government at the beginning of June 1996, detailing hundreds of cases of human rights violations, particularly arbitrary arrest and detention of political prisoners, unfair trial, torture, abduction and beatings of political opponents, extrajudicial executions, "disappearances", the use of judicial punishments of flogging and amputation, the death penalty, abuses experienced by asylum seekers, and human rights abuses by armed political groups.

"This clearly illustrates the failure of the government to put fully into practice international human rights standards to which it is a party and most of which are adopted in its domestic legislation," said Derek Evans.

"While we were discussing our concerns with the authorities, we continued receiving reports of arbitrary arrests of political suspects, torture, use of leg irons, death sentences passed by courts, and harassment of political opponents."

The organization is concerned by the impunity enjoyed by members of the Political Security Office and other members of the police forces who still carry out arbitrary arrests, threaten and harass political opponents, journalists, lawyers and human rights activists. It is particularly concerned by the lengthy judicial procedures, the lack of investigation of human rights abuses and the unfairness of political trials.

However, the talks were guided overall by a spirit of frankness and cooperation and Amnesty International welcomed a number of important undertakings by the government:

- Arbitrary detention - The lack of judicial accountability of the Political Security Office, the main arresting authority of political suspects, was raised by Amnesty International in all meetings with government officials and most of the authorities met acknowledged the need to make the Political Security adhere to the law. The Attorney General informed the delegates that the government had been considering the establishment of a separate judicial public prosecution to supervise the activities of the Political Security. In the meantime, he undertook to issue with immediate effect a circular to all detaining

authorities, including the Political Security, instructing them to end the practice of arbitrary arrest and detention and to abide by the laws which prohibit such practice.

- Torture - The Attorney General also undertook to set up a central monitoring unit in his office to investigate torture allegations. Amnesty International urged that such a unit's central roles be to ease the legal burden and provide support for torture victims, to bring perpetrators to justice and to play an active role in the prevention of torture.
- “Disappearance” - The Attorney General undertook to investigate all cases of “disappearances” which are reported to have occurred since 1994. Amnesty International delegates agreed to provide the government with information available to the organization to facilitate this task.
- Human rights violations against women - The Attorney General undertook immediately to investigate and take corrective action in relation to the continued use of shackles and other human rights violations against women in prisons detailed by Amnesty International.

The Prime Minister, 'Abdul 'Aziz 'Abdul-Ghani, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr 'Abdul-Karim 'Ali al-Iryani, and the Minister of Interior, Hussein Muhammad Arab, undertook to cooperate with Amnesty International and to implement the recommendations addressed by the organization to the government.

“While we welcome the commitments made by the government, these commitments must be urgently translated into practice,” Amnesty International said. “The continued widespread reports of human rights violations, especially torture and arbitrary political detention, indicate that the government needs not only to take action in response to specific violations but should initiate an active program of prevention.”

Amnesty International urges the Government of Yemen to build on the substantial human rights safeguards already provided in the constitution to become the first government in the region to develop a comprehensive plan of action for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Amnesty International will monitor closely implementation of the government's commitments, and urges the Yemeni Government to make these commitments public to the media to encourage the victims of human rights violations to file complaints to the Attorney General's office.

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