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Ukrainian President must honour commitment to police reform ahead of Euro 2012

Amnesty International is calling on the Ukrainian authorities to immediately establish an independent agency to investigate police abuses following the commitment made on Friday by President Viktor Yanukovich to reforming the police ahead of Euro 2012.

In a speech to senior officers ahead of Ukraine's national police day on 20 December, President Yanukovich called for reforms in line with best European practice, and called for video surveillance of places of detention to prevent human rights abuses.

The president said the state carried full responsibility for the welfare of people detained by the police and also stated that the common practice of refusing to investigate citizens' complaints of police abuse was "unacceptable".

"We very much welcome these statements by President Yanukovich, but we would like to stress that independent investigations into police abuse are key to the reform President Yanukovich is speaking about so that human rights abuses within Ukraine's police system become a thing of the past," said Heather McGill, Amnesty International's researcher on Ukraine.

"If the President is serious about guaranteeing the rights of Ukrainian citizens and visitors to the 2012 championship he must follow these words with action and throw his political weight behind the creation of a separate institution to investigate police abuses."

President Yanukovich told police officers that their most important challenge has become policing the 2012 European football championship and told officials:

"I will support any substantial initiatives aimed at optimizing the structure of the Ministry [of Internal Affairs] and its territorial units, measures to enhance transparency of the police, motivating employees, and improving cooperation with the public."

In its recent report on police criminality Amnesty International highlighted the Ukrainian police force's frequent use of torture, beatings, and fabricated charges to boost crime solving statistics.

No evidence of a crime: Paying the price for police impunity in Ukraine revealed how police are rarely punished for their crimes because of a system that relies on colleagues in the local prosecutor's office to investigate.

The Ukrainian Ombudsperson's office stated that they received 5,000 complaints about police torture and other ill-treatment last year, but only 10 police officers were prosecuted.

"Reforms leading to independent investigations of police abuse are long overdue. They will benefit

people living in Ukraine and visitors to the country. They will also raise the prestige of the police and help it fulfill its duty to defend the rights of the people,” said Heather McGill.