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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES THE DUTCH EU PRESIDENCY TO CLOSE THE GAP BETWEEN RHETORIC AND PRACTICE IN EU HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY

(The Hague/Brussels 29 June 2004) In its recommendations to the Dutch EU Presidency released today, Amnesty International calls for the EU to speak out and act more decisively for human rights in a world where those rights are increasingly under attack.

Amnesty International's 18-page document: "*Closing the gap between rhetoric and practice: Amnesty International's recommendations to the Dutch EU Presidency*" will be available on www.amnesty-eu.org from 10.00 on Tuesday 29 June, 2004.

Amnesty International's detailed recommendations include a call for the proposed EU Human Rights Agency to concentrate on human rights compliance within the EU, and the appointment of an EU Special Representative for Human Rights to improve delivery on human rights goals around the world.

"Of the major actors, the EU is probably the best placed to take the lead in confronting the global human rights crisis. But that requires more than simply reaffirming values and making passing references to human rights," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office, told a media conference today in The Hague.

Other speakers at the media conference included the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Theo van Boven and the Chair of Amnesty International's Dutch Section, Lilian Gonçalves-Ho Kang You.

"Over the next six months, the Dutch EU Presidency must inject new vitality into the EU human rights agenda, by putting real pressure at the highest level on governments which allow human rights violations to occur. This means actually putting into practice the full arsenal of EU human rights policies adopted over recent years," Dick Oosting said.

"We are witnessing a growing gap between the drive to fight 'terrorism' and 'illegal immigration' and the commitment to protect individual rights. Now is the time for the EU to redress this imbalance, at home as well as abroad."

Among Amnesty International's many recommendations are:

At home:

- The new EU Human Rights Agency should monitor human rights within the EU;
- The proposed Council framework decision on suspects' and defendants' rights in criminal proceedings should not weaken current standards - a key not only to

protecting individual rights in practice but also to preventing traffickers in human beings and perpetrators of terrorist acts from escaping with impunity;

- EU legislation should be introduced to protect vulnerable victims of crime, in particular victims of gender-based crime;
- Discrimination against Roma within the EU must be addressed as a matter of priority;
- The "Tampere" commitments, including the "full and inclusive application of the Geneva Convention", need to be reinvigorated to guide the further development of a Common European Asylum System;
- An independent European refugee documentation centre should be established to ensure availability of common European country reports;
- The Presidency should promote an adequate return policy, ensuring full observance of the non-refoulement principle and other relevant international standards.

Abroad:

- Consideration should be given to the appointment of an EU Special Representative for Human Rights to strengthen the capacity to implement EU human rights policies;
- A decision by the European Council to start accession negotiations with Turkey should be based on a thorough analysis of concrete improvements and shortcomings in human rights, in practice;
- The agenda for the EU-Russia summit in The Hague in November must include rigorous scrutiny of Russia's conduct in Chechnya;
- The Presidency should rally EU support for the early deployment of international human rights monitors to Iraq and demand that the United States and the United Kingdom conduct thorough, independent and public investigations of torture and ill-treatment by coalition forces in Iraqi prisons;
- Pressure should be exerted on the government of Sudan to allow the deployment of human rights monitors in Darfur;
- EU member states, including the Netherlands, must manifest their commitment to combat torture by signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture;
- The EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports should be significantly strengthened and the Presidency is urged to support work towards a global arms trade treaty;
- The Dutch Presidency should clearly stipulate which concrete improvements are required in the human rights conduct of the Chinese government for the EU to consider lifting the arms embargo against China.

For Amnesty International's recommendations, see:

"Closing the gap between rhetoric and practice: Amnesty International's recommendations to the Dutch EU Presidency" available on www.amnesty-eu.org from 10.00 on Tuesday 29 June, 2004.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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