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Spain: Window of opportunity for a fresh start on human rights

Amnesty International submits proposal for human rights action plan Commitments on foreign policy must be matched with commitments domestically

(Madrid) As the Spanish government marks its first 50 days in office, Amnesty International submitted to the authorities concrete suggestions for a national human rights action plan.

Spain: The necessary commitment – AI recommendations for a human rights action plan defines the key human rights challenges facing Spain, sets a roadmap for change and contains a list of 15 indicators to assess the government's performance against its promises.

"Change on human rights must be substantial and not rhetorical," said Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan at the end of her first visit to Spain. "We will judge the government not on the basis of assurances but on the action it takes against these indicators," said Ms Khan.

Amnesty International calls for the plan to be:

- Consistent – with international law and obligations;
- Coherent – in demonstrating the same commitment to human rights at home and abroad;
- Concrete – in ensuring that promises are converted from paper to practice.

At the international level, Amnesty International calls on Spain to uphold and promote international human rights at the UN Security Council, the UN Counter Terrorism Committee and in bilateral relations such as with Cuba, Colombia and Morocco and Western Sahara.

"The new foreign policy approach of this government has given Spain the swing vote in the UN which it should use to make a real difference to human rights globally," said Ms Khan.

Amnesty International welcomed the government's assurances that it will support international institutions, international law and human rights. The organization also welcomed the government's intention to ratify a number of international treaties such as Protocols 4, 7 and 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture.

"Given that the proliferation and abuse of small arms internationally has serious consequences for the protection of human rights, we are pleased that President Rodriguez Zapatero agreed to support our campaign to control small arms and to consider the possibility of sponsoring an international arms trade

treaty,” said Ms Khan.

“However, the government’s credibility on human rights internationally will depend on how well it confronts human rights problems domestically,” she added.

Spain: The necessary commitment – AI recommendations for a human rights action plan reiterates the organization’s concerns about torture and ill treatment, racism, restrictions on the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, and violence against women in the country.

“We recognise the duty of the government to protect people against the threat of violence, killings and intimidation by armed groups. We unequivocally condemn violent acts committed by ETA or others. The attack of 11 March was a crime against humanity. Those who commit such acts must be brought to justice – but justice in accordance with international human rights standards,” said Ms Khan.

“Sacrificing human rights in the name of security is short-sighted and counter-productive,” said Ms Khan as she called on the government to review the incommunicado detention regime, address allegations of torture and ill treatment and resist restrictions on the rights of migrants.

Amnesty International, the United Nations and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture have consistently documented serious allegations of torture and ill-treatment in Spain, including racially-motivated cases.

“In the past denial has fed the cycle of torture and ill-treatment. This government must now confront its obligations, fully investigate allegations, and make it clear that there will be zero tolerance for torture,” said Ms Khan.

“We call on the government to review recommendations made by expert international bodies to prevent torture. These safeguards are the best way to protect the rights of the detainees and the reputation of the law enforcement officials against false complaints.”

Amnesty International noted the persistence of racism and xenophobia in parts of Spain, its document seeks commitments to tackle racial and ethnic discrimination, and to ensure the human rights and dignity of migrants.

Amnesty International welcomed the government’s decision to give priority to addressing violence against women.

“This is a positive initiative. We hope that the proposed law will ensure the same standards of protection for all women in Spain – Spanish or foreign, urban or rural,” said Ms Khan.

“The government must not forget other victims. It should recuperate the memory, dignity and remains of the forgotten victims of the Civil War and Franco’s regime.”

In meetings with the Presidents of Catalonia and the Basque country, Amnesty International also proposed regional human rights plans to complement the national one. Irene Khan said: “We welcome the positive reaction of the Catalan and Basque authorities to our proposal.”

“There are some issues on which we have complete agreement, others where we have differences. Our document is an agenda for dialogue over difficult issues in a constructive manner,” said Ms Khan

“We appreciate the openness of the central government and the autonomous regional governments of Catalonia and the Basque country as well the main opposition political party to listen to us, their readiness to engage with us, and their willingness to consider our recommendations. Now, the real test lies ahead as to how concretely, coherently and consistently promises are translated into action.”

Background

An Amnesty International delegation led by the Secretary General, Irene Khan, has been in Spain since 5 June. They have visited Madrid, Barcelona and Vitoria where they held talks with representatives of civil society and members of the government. They met with the President of Government Rodriguez Zapatero, Minister of Justice, Minister of Foreign Affairs, President of the Council of the Judicial Power, President of the Generalitat of Catalonia, President of the Basque Country, Vice-President of the Catalan Parliament, President of the Basque Parliament, Human Rights Commission of the Basque Parliament, Leader of *Partido Popular*. On 11 June, Ms Khan will meet the Leader of *Izquierda Unida*. Later on that day she will hand over messages of solidarity from all over the world to victims of the 11 March attacks.

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