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NAMIBIA: A concern while the world improves

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Tomorrow the world will celebrate the United Nations human rights day. This year's anniversary, the first in the new millennium, comes while the issue of human rights is attracting increasing support and respect in most parts of the globe.

During the last few years the world witnessed more countries committing themselves to human rights protection by ratifying international human rights treaties and incorporating them into national law. Amnesty International's membership has for instance increased notably since it was founded in the UK almost 40 years ago.

Amnesty International's membership is witnessing a remarkable increase in Africa and Asia, consisting of people coming from different backgrounds, all united in one cause: the protection of human rights worldwide. This is clear evidence of the increasing support for the issue of human rights.

However, there are parts of the world where human rights are still under siege, and respect for human dignity is deteriorating.

The Namibian government, which has a good constitution with regards to human rights protection, has over the past few months acted in ways that warrant new concern.

The way the authorities dealt with those charged with treason in the Caprivi strip contradicts Namibian obligations under international law. This was clear in the pattern of massive torture during arrests and initial interrogations, and none of the perpetrators have yet been brought to justice. Amnesty International also fears that Namibia is breaking its obligations to give the accused a fair trial.

Amnesty International remains very concerned with the situation in the areas along the border with Angola, especially in the Kavango region, where frequent human rights violations have been reported since Angolan government troops were allowed to use Namibian territories in the Angolan civil war to fight UNITA from December last year. Amnesty International's mission to Namibia in January revealed however, that an increasing number of the human rights violations were committed by Namibian authorities, especially the Special Field Forces.

These are violations of the commitments that the Namibian government has as a state party to a number of international conventions including the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Amnesty International urges the Namibian government to change this trend, by respecting the constitution of Namibia and the international commitments which it made when ratified the treaties and conventions on human rights.

Namibia's obligations under these treaties also include reporting to the relevant international bodies on the different conventions. Namibia has not yet reported to the UN Human Rights Committee on the ICCPR. Namibia should have made its second report on CAT this year. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has scheduled the consideration of Namibia's report for their next meeting in April 2001.

Amnesty International and other local and international human rights groups are eagerly awaiting Namibia's human rights reports to the relevant international bodies and will be keen to contribute to the process.

KEYWORDS:

This report summarizes a -page document (words), : NAMIBIA Human rights day (AI Index: AFR 42/05/00) issued by Amnesty International in 7 December 2000. Anyone wishing further details or to take action on this issue should consult the full document. An extensive range of our materials on this and other subjects is available at <http://www.amnesty.org> and Amnesty International news releases can be received by email: <http://www.amnesty.org/news/emailnws.htm>

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