

"The territory's problems are compounded by the fact that its legal system is undeveloped, non-governmental organisations have not been encouraged, and little has been done to generate human rights awareness among the public," the human rights organisation pointed out.

"There is, thus, an urgent need for the authorities to provide judges, lawyers and interpreters with specialised human rights training and make firm commitments to protecting the freedom of expression and association."

The onus of guaranteeing human rights in Macau also falls on Beijing, in view of the limits on Macau's autonomy.

"A prosperous, law-abiding and rights-respecting Macau is in China's interests, too. The fate of human rights in Macau after the handover will be a fundamental measure of a successful political transition and China's own commitment to human rights," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organisation called upon the international community to closely monitor the human rights situation in Macau. "Unlike Hong Kong, Macau lacks the structures of a robust civil society and is thus in even greater need of international scrutiny and support."

Background:

Chinese sovereignty over the island of Macau will be practised according to the "one country, two systems" model, which gives Macau a degree of autonomy in its legislative, executive and judicial powers.

The Basic Law, which comes into force after the handover, will serve as a mini-constitution for Macau. Laws and norms previously in force in Macau are supposed to remain, under the principle of continuity for the existing legal and political system, negotiated between Lisbon and Beijing. This is provided, however, that they do not contravene the Basic Law, which Beijing has the power to interpret and amend.

The negotiating process for the handover has been marked by delays, obstacles and last-minute improvisations. Many issues, particularly in the area of human rights, did not become the object of satisfactory agreements, or were quite simply never addressed.

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