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UN: Time to Act
Secure justice for people whose economic, social and cultural rights are violated

This month the UN General Assembly will discuss taking a crucial step to secure access to justice for everyone whose economic, social and cultural rights are violated and who is denied a remedy at the national level. Sixty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in which the international community recognized that everyone, everywhere has civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, this step is a long-overdue clear and concrete action to implement the declaration made fifteen years ago at the Vienna World Conference that “all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis.”

In the coming weeks, UN Member States convening in New York at the General Assembly session will consider the adoption of an international instrument – the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Optional Protocol). Once in force, this instrument will provide access to justice for victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights who cannot get a remedy at the national level.

Amnesty International emphasizes the importance of using this historic moment to rectify the imbalance between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, which has particularly denied marginalized groups and those living in poverty the ability to demand an effective remedy when their rights are violated.

“Many of those who have suffered violations of their rights, including rights to adequate housing, food, water and sanitation, health, education and decent work, are denied the ability and power to hold those responsible to account,” said Duncan Wilson, Amnesty International’s senior policy expert on economic, social and cultural rights. “Sixty years after the world adopted the Universal Declaration of Human rights, this has to change. Everyone everywhere must have access to justice to defend their economic, social and cultural rights”.

Amnesty International calls on all members of the UN to celebrate 60th anniversary of the UDHR with the adoption of the Optional Protocol, in its current form, by the General Assembly on the 10th of December 2008.

Background:

The elaboration and adoption of the Optional Protocol is the culmination of five years of negotiations by an intergovernmental Working Group. The final agreed text is a compromise and has the support of an overwhelming number of UN Member States. The Optional Protocol will provide the opportunity for individuals seeking a remedy for violations of economic, social and cultural rights to have their complaints adjudicated by UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights.