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Philippines: President Arroyo must ensure credibility of political killings commission

[London] In a meeting with President Gloria Arroyo today, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan urged her to ensure the Melo Commission's inquiry into political killings is transparent, independently conducted, and leads to accountability and justice for the victims. This meeting follows the publication in August of Amnesty International's report into political killings.

In a frank and constructive dialogue, Ms Khan welcomed President Arroyo's decision to establish the Melo Commission to investigate patterns of political killings. She called on the President to exercise the same determined leadership that saw the Philippines abolish the death penalty in June this year, to put an end to the political killings and to strengthen the administration of justice.

Ms Khan presented the President with a memorandum setting out international guidelines on commissions of inquiries. She stated the need for the Melo Commission to adhere to these standards in order to gain the credibility and support of all sides, and carry out its work effectively and independently.

"The Melo Commission must be independent and seen to be independent of the government. For this to happen, it should deploy its own independent investigators where necessary," said Ms Khan.

"The Commission should take a victim-centred approach, with justice for the victims as paramount."

"Intimidation and violence is still a very real problem and witnesses will not come forward if they are scared for their lives. The government needs to provide effective witness protection: victims' families, witnesses and all others involved must be protected," said Ms Khan.

She concluded: "The ultimate measure of a commission of inquiry is whether its recommendations lead to long-term change. The Melo Commission should propose reforms which would prevent the repetition of past human rights violations, whether that means reforming laws and institutional practices or strengthening the justice system."

"The Melo Commission must not shy away from making hard-hitting recommendations to end political killings once and for all, which would help restore conditions for the peace process between the government and the communists to be restarted, based on respect for human rights by all sides."

To see the memorandum, please go to: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa350102006>.

To see Amnesty International's report on political killings, please go to:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa350062006>.

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