

## Ukraine: Rights still being violated

Torture, ill-treatment and curtailment of freedom of expression persist in Ukraine ten years after it emerged as an independent state following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Amnesty International said today as it published its report *Ukraine before the United Nations Human Rights Committee*.

"While there has certainly been some progress during the past decade with the abolition of the death penalty, Ukrainian authorities still have much to do to improve the human rights situation in the country," Amnesty International added.

Ukraine will come under the international spotlight this week as the UN Human Rights Committee scrutinizes Ukraine's human rights track record, starting on Monday in Geneva. In mid-November it will be the turn of the UN Committee against Torture to hold Ukraine to account.

"Both of these authoritative international human rights bodies should impress on Ukraine the need for greater progress in the field of human rights", Amnesty International stated. "Ukraine should view this occasion as a timely opportunity to put human rights firmly on the country's political agenda."

Amnesty International is concerned that allegations of torture and ill-treatment of detainees by law enforcement officials persist. Reports received include allegations that detainees have been hit and kicked or struck with various objects. Victims of torture and ill-treatment have suffered serious injury, sometimes resulting in death.

Detainees are often refused prompt access to legal counsel and to inform relatives of their detention and arrest. Furthermore, some detainees have reportedly been subjected to torture and ill-treatment in order to elicit a "confession".

One detainee in the town of Enakievo in November 1998, related how he was tortured to sign such a "confession". He described that his wrists were handcuffed under his knees. A length of wood was slotted in between his arms and chest, after which he was lifted up by the length of wood by several officers and hung between two tables. Police officers proceeded to punch and kick him while he was painfully suspended in this state.

"Ukraine's real commitment to human rights must be questioned," Amnesty International said. "When formal complaints have been lodged and investigations opened in cases of alleged torture or ill-treatment by police officers, they have been slow, frequently lacking in thoroughness and often inconclusive. The impartiality of a significant number of investigations is also in doubt."

Brutality is also widespread in Ukraine's armed forces, where soldier on soldier violence persists in the form of hazing. Officers of the armed forces continue to tolerate, permit, and

sometimes participate in the hazing of recruits (*dedovshchina*), which has resulted in beatings, torture and death.

"Recruits have sometimes chosen suicide or desertion in order to escape their torture and ill-treatment," Amnesty International said.

Freedom of expression in Ukraine has also come under increased pressure in recent years. Editors of independent newspapers and television companies have complained of being repeatedly subjected to tax audits as well as sanitary and fire checks by the authorities in an apparent attempt to stifle their work. Similarly, the authorities have resorted to the charge of criminal libel in a significant number of occasions, apparently in order to silence critical journalism.

"Press freedom has also been curtailed through overt forms of harassment and intimidation, whereby journalists have been physically attacked by unknown assailants, sometimes resulting in death. The circumstances surrounding many of these attacks remain unresolved and only occasionally have those responsible been brought to justice," Amnesty International said.

In the past year, allegations of state involvement in the possible "disappearance" of the investigative journalist, Georgiy Gongadze, and the apparent failure of the Ukrainian authorities to promptly and impartially investigate the incident have resulted in both domestic and international concern.

In its report Amnesty International makes a number of recommendations, urging the Ukrainian authorities to take immediate steps to guarantee the integrity of its citizens and ensure that torture or ill-treatment are not tolerated and those found responsible are held accountable.

Amnesty International also calls on the Ukrainian government to ensure that news media are not subjected to arbitrarily-applied legal measures and to put an end to imposing professional bans on journalists.

"Ukraine must fully implement its various international human rights obligations in order to really signify its departure from the past," Amnesty International said.

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