

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Arab League: Amnesty International recommendations on the election of members of the Arab Human Rights Committee

Amnesty International has written to the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States (Arab League) urging him to provide clear guidelines for the election of members of the new Arab Human Rights Committee, which will oversee implementation of the revised Arab Charter on Human Rights.

Under the Charter, which came into force on 15 March 2008 after it was ratified by seven members of the Arab League, a seven member Arab Human Rights Committee must be established to review periodic reports from states parties and to make recommendations on implementation of the provisions of the revised Charter. The Committee is to be elected at least six months after the revised Charter came into effect by the governments of the states who are now party to this new international human rights treaty – that is, on or after 15 September 2008.

In a letter dated 9 June 2008, Amnesty International proposed to the Arab League Secretary-General that he issues written guidance to the state parties on their nomination and the process for electing members to the Arab Human Rights Committee, which can be expected to have a key role in influencing the implementation of the revised Charter and in interpreting and shaping its development. The organisation urged the Arab League to create a Consultative Committee composed of independent persons, including some drawn from civil society organisations, to assist in developing criteria for membership of the Arab Human Rights Committee and identifying and assessing suitable candidates.

In its letter, Amnesty International recommended that those nominated for and elected to the Arab Human Rights Committee should be individuals of acknowledged integrity, independence and competence who have relevant legal and/or other professional expertise and experience. As well, the new Committee should have an appropriate gender balance and be reflective of the diversity of the states comprising the Arab League, including their different legal systems. Electing competent and independent individuals to the Arab Human Rights Committee is vital to ensuring proper monitoring of a state's treaty obligations.

Amnesty International also urged the Arab League's Secretary-General to encourage the governments of the states who are party to the revised Charter to each nominate more than one candidate for election to the Arab Human Rights Committee and to ensure that their nomination lists take account of the need to ensure appropriate gender balance. As well, states' procedures for identifying and nominating candidates,

and the election procedures, should be clear and transparent, and should be designed to encourage and facilitate effective consultation with and advice from relevant civil society organisations.

National, local and regional human rights and other civil society organisations can contribute significantly to the process of selecting members of the Arab Human Rights Committee if state authorities provide the appropriate means. In particular, they can assist by providing comments and advice on the criteria for membership, help identify and assess suitable candidates and also promote public awareness of the revised Charter and its provisions.

Amnesty International recommendations to the Arab League Secretary-General draw on the organisation's long experience with international and regional human rights treaty monitoring bodies. Further information can be found in ***The Arab Human Rights Committee: Elections of Members and Criteria of Membership***, AI Index IOR 65/001/2008)

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