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Public Statement

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Libya: Abolition of People's Court is an important step

Amnesty International warmly welcomes the resolution passed yesterday by the General People's Congress - Libya's Parliament - to abolish the People's Court.

The abolition of this exceptional court, known to try political cases, is an important step forward for human rights in Libya, which should contribute to effective and durable human rights protection in the country.

During its visit to Libya in February 2004 and since its return, Amnesty International has highlighted a pattern of unfair trials before the People's Court. In trials before the People's Court documented by Amnesty International, the rights of the accused were routinely violated, even in instances where these rights are guaranteed in Libyan law.

Amnesty International is yet to receive a copy of the text of the resolution or details about plans surrounding its abolition. The organization hopes that these plans will provide for the abolition of related institutions, including the Popular Prosecution Office, and the transfer of all pending cases to the jurisdiction of the ordinary criminal court system.

The organization also calls on the authorities to review all cases of prisoners who were tried by the People's Court in the past. They should be retried before ordinary courts, in full compliance with international standards for fair trial, if they are not to be released.

Several other new resolutions relating to different aspects of Libyan society were passed during this General People's Congress, which met for its ordinary annual session between 8 and 12 January 2005. These reportedly include a resolution relating to the establishment of a new committee, within the Secretariat of the General People's Congress, on legal affairs and human rights.

Amnesty International welcomes the decision to create a body which will focus on legal affairs and human rights. The organization hopes that this new body will be independent and impartial and will work towards enhancing human rights protection in Libya.

Amnesty International looks forward to receiving copies of the aforementioned resolutions to enable a thorough examination of their content.

During the General People's Congress, Colonel Mu'ammarr al-Gaddafi, Leader of the Revolution, issued a directive in which he called for the establishment of investigative committees aimed to identify any prisoners it finds to be prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International is pleased to see the authorities' willingness to address the pressing issue of prisoners of conscience in Libyan prisons. We hope that those appointed to work on these committees will use internationally agreed standards relating to freedom of expression and association when assessing which prisoners can be classified as prisoners of conscience.

The organization is aware of scores of men, sentenced solely for the peaceful expression of their political beliefs, who are currently held in Libyan prisons. They include some 85 prisoners of conscience sentenced on appeal in December 2004 to between ten years' imprisonment and the death penalty on suspicion of supporting or sympathizing with the banned Libyan Islamic Group (al-Jama'a al-Islamiya al-Libya), also known as the Muslim Brothers.