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## **Guyana: time to put human rights commitment into practice**

To demonstrate its stated commitment to promoting and ensuring respect for human rights in law and practice, the Government of Guyana should implement in full the recommendations of the (United Nations) Human Rights Committee, Amnesty International said today.

The 22 recommendations were made public on 31 March 2000, at the conclusion of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Committee, which monitors implementation and compliance by states parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The Committee held two public sessions with a delegation from the government of Guyana to discuss the country's second periodic report, which was twelve years overdue. An Amnesty International delegation observed the sessions.

Amnesty International welcomed the Guyana delegation's statement of commitment to implement the provisions of the ICCPR and willingness to use the session constructively.

"As Guyana begins the process of rewriting its constitution, it has an immediate opportunity to put its commitment into practice and to ensure that the fundamental human rights enshrined in the ICCPR are incorporated into the new constitution, as recommended by the Human Rights Committee," the organization said.

Amnesty International urged the government to pay particular attention to recommendations concerning the use of excessive force by law enforcement officers; the imposition of the death penalty; the obligation to treat people deprived of their liberty with humanity; the detention of children with adults; and the detention of young children generally.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern that the use of force by law enforcement officials in Guyana appears to be excessive in many cases. The organization welcomes the Committee's recommendation that, "all allegations of extra-judicial killings and excessive use of force should be promptly investigated by an impartial body, and measures taken to ensure the prosecution of offenders, and to provide effective remedies to victims. All law enforcement officials should be thoroughly trained in international human rights standards."

The organization also renewed its call for the Government of Guyana to withdraw its reservation to the Optional Protocol of the ICCPR. The Optional Protocol allows for individuals to bring individual complaints of violations under the ICCPR to the attention of the Committee.

Other recommendations by the Committee include: the elimination of the practice of corporal punishment; strict compliance with procedural safeguards in all criminal cases; the reassessment of the functioning and independence of the Police Complaints Authority; the recruitment of an ethnically diverse police force; the inclusion of Amerindians in decision making processes affecting their rights under the Covenant; the implementation of the principles of equality and non-discrimination for all in the new constitution.

"It is now time for the government of Guyana to show its commitment to human rights in deeds not words," Amnesty International said.

## **Background**

Guyana ratified the ICCPR on 15 February 1977. Under the leadership of Cheddi Jagan, it ratified the Optional Protocol on 10 May 1993 but it withdrew and re-acceded with a reservation prohibiting the Committee from considering petitions brought by people under sentence of death on 16 December 1998.

With regard to the reservation to the Optional Protocol, the Committee urged Guyana to take into account the views it had expressed in the ruling rejecting an identical reservation by Trinidad and Tobago in November 1999. On that occasion the Committee stated that "... a reservation which singles out a certain group of individuals for lesser procedural protection than that which is enjoyed by the rest of the population ... constitutes a discrimination which runs counter to some of the basic principles embodied in the Covenant and its Protocols."

As of March 2000, 144 countries had ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which entered into force on 23 March 1976. In order to monitor compliance with its provisions, the ICCPR requires states parties to submit reports on a periodic basis to the Human Rights Committee, which comprises 18 independent experts.

Other countries whose periodic reports was considered at the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Committee were: the Republic of the Congo, UK (Jersey, Guernsey and Isle of Man) and Mongolia.

The full text of the conclusions and recommendations of the Human Rights Committee are made available by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the United Nations website: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org) .

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