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EU Foreign Ministers Today: NEW EU force in Bosnia-Herzegovina must not make the same mistakes as "SFOR"

(Brussels 12 July 2004) As European Union foreign ministers prepare to adopt guidelines today for the new EU military operation (to be known as "ALTHEA") in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which will take over from the NATO-led SFOR, Amnesty International warns the EU to learn from SFOR's shortcomings.

In particular, Amnesty International points to its concerns, repeatedly raised with NATO and individual governments contributing troops, about instances where SFOR has failed to adhere to international human rights law and standards, including unlawful and arbitrary arrests and allegations of ill-treatment of detainees by members of SFOR.

"The EU should not fall victim to the same lack of safeguards shown by SFOR including the failure to adequately address violations of detainees' human rights. Amnesty International believes SFOR's mistakes were partly due to the lack of adequate civilian control," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office said.

"It is more important than ever to ensure the highest standards of behaviour of troops on foreign soil, with real accountability to match," he said.

In deciding on the Council Joint Action on the new EU mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Amnesty International calls on the EU to:

- commit itself to abide fully by international human rights law, and to ensure that its standards are applied in ALTHEA operations;
- establish a centralized system of civilian control over ALTHEA;
- establish centralized and transparent procedures whereby allegations of human rights violations by ALTHEA members are thoroughly and impartially investigated and disciplinary procedures and criminal proceedings are initiated against ALTHEA members who are reasonably suspected of having committed human rights violations;
- grant jurisdiction to the Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina over ALTHEA activities;
- provide comprehensive and consistent training in international human rights standards to all ALTHEA personnel.

In particular, Amnesty International believes ALTHEA must:

- actively seek those indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, coordinating its activities with NATO forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina where appropriate, with a view to arresting the suspects and transferring them to the Tribunal's custody;
- immediately turn over to the competent authorities of Bosnia-Herzegovina all individuals

detained by ALTHEA, for whom no arrest warrant was issued by the Tribunal;
discontinue SFOR's current practice of arbitrary detention;
adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of sexual exploitation, including
prohibiting through disciplinary and criminal sanctions, the use of women and girls
trafficked into forced prostitution;
ensure reparation, including paying appropriate compensation, to victims of human rights
violations committed by its personnel.

See Amnesty International's recent report:

***The apparent lack of accountability of international peace-keeping forces in Kosovo
and Bosnia-Herzegovina*** (AI INDEX EUR/05/002/2004)

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR050022004?open&of=ENG-2EU>

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