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Armenia: Time to work towards ending torture

The Armenian Government should implement without delay recommendations issued by the United Nations (UN) Committee against Torture on Friday in Geneva, Amnesty International said today.

While welcoming Armenia's willingness to acknowledge problems during this transitional phase in the country's history, Amnesty International strongly urges the government to set about improving its human rights record and implement fully and promptly the Committee's recommendations.

Amnesty International detailed a number of concerns about torture in Armenia in a submission to the UN Committee. These included persistent allegations that law enforcement officials have subjected people to torture and ill-treatment as a tool for obtaining confessions and coercing testimony, or for intimidation and extortion. The organization has received reports that some detainees have died as a result of torture. In many cases the authorities have been reluctant to conduct prompt and comprehensive investigations, or to initiate proceedings against those alleged to be responsible.

The Committee recommends that detained persons should be guaranteed immediate access to their lawyer, to family members and to a doctor of their choice and that Armenia establish an effective and genuinely independent system of inspection of all places of detention run by the Ministries of Interior, Justice and Defence.

There have also been reports of army conscripts being subjected to brutal hazing (being forced to perform degrading tasks) which have led to beatings and suicides, while officers turn a blind eye. The Committee recommends that Armenia carry out, without delay, independent investigations into allegations of hazing in the army (and institute proceedings when such allegations are upheld).

The Committee also recommends Armenia adopt a domestic legal definition of torture strictly in line with that set out in Article 1 of the UN Convention against Torture. It welcomes the willingness of the government to establish the Office of an Ombudsperson.

Death sentences continue to be meted out, despite a moratorium on actual executions, with over 30 men currently on death row. The Committee welcomes the moratorium on executions and recommends that Armenia adopt as soon as possible the draft criminal code which abolishes the death penalty, as a way of resolving the situation of those currently on death row. It notes that the uncertain situation in which these condemned prisoners are placed appears to amount to cruel and inhuman treatment.

In addition the Committee notes that Armenia had not informed the Committee, as requested in the last round of observations, about the results of any investigations into the allegations of ill-treatment which had been brought to the attention of the Committee by Amnesty International, among others.

For further information on Amnesty International's concerns please see the document *Armenia: Comments on the Initial Report submitted to the United Nations Committee against Torture*, AI Index: EUR 54/02/00, April 2000.

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