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KAZAKSTAN: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS FOR ACTION AGAINST
"INHUMAN" TREATMENT OF CHILD PRISONERS

Juvenile prisoners in Kazakstan are exposed to a brutal and brutalizing regime of "fist and truncheon", according to an Amnesty International report issued today.

In a survey of conditions throughout Kazakstan's prison system, the human rights organization condemns the deliberate ill-treatment of both juvenile and adult prisoners, and appalling conditions of detention amounting to ill-treatment.

"The fact that even the officials in charge say that the death penalty is less cruel than being in prison in Kazakstan gives a clear picture of how desperate the lives of prisoners are," Amnesty International said.

The report highlights cases of torture and beatings in police stations and penitentiaries. Amnesty International has also documented cases of confinement in punishment cells which do not meet minimum international standards, for example when the prisoner is held in a one square metre cell, or in freezing temperatures or pitch darkness.

Throughout the prison system inmates suffer exposure to untreated diseases such as tuberculosis. Many are malnourished or starving. Overcrowding is so bad in some prisons that inmates have to sleep in shifts.

At a juvenile labour camp in the capital, Almaty, at least eight inmates are believed to have died in suspicious circumstances in the past year, including some allegedly from untreated illness or malnutrition. Amnesty International is calling for an inquiry into these deaths and for anyone found criminally responsible to be brought to justice.

Kazakstani officials publicly admitted in April the problems of disease and overcrowding in the prisons, and blamed under-funding for the problems. Last month an amnesty cut the penitentiary population of some 74,000 by more than a quarter. However, Amnesty International has grave doubts that the releases are enough to produce significant changes in the conditions of the remaining prisoners.

In addition to calling for Kazakstan to do all within its means to comply with international human rights standards for the treatment of prisoners, Amnesty International is seeking through its report to lobby the international community to work with Kazakstani authorities to address these issues.

The human rights organization also points out that these chronic problems are in no way unique to Kazakstan, but are an example of prison conditions existing throughout the former Soviet Union.

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