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EU-Central Asia: “send the right signals”

(Brussels, 27 March 2007) The German Presidency of the EU should not shy away from asking questions related to human rights abuse during the EU-Central Asia talks, says Amnesty International on the eve of the meetings taking place in Kazakhstan.

In a letter and a briefing note sent to the EU Presidency (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) Amnesty International presented an overview of its concerns in the region and asked the delegation to enquire about the status of prisoners of conscience, including journalists and opposition politicians.

Amnesty International is particularly worried about the on-going human rights violations in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and asked the EU to send a strong signal to the governments of these countries calling on them to urgently address their human rights record.

"Some Central Asian countries are trying to reform and the EU should encourage these efforts. But others remain caught in a cycle of abuse and ignoring this is turning your back on the citizens of those countries" said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International EU Office.

Amnesty International once again raised its concerns about the use of the death penalty. Most Central Asian countries have taken important steps to abolish capital punishment but in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan courts continue to pass death sentences.

On-going practices of forcible returns, notably from Kazakhstan to China under the pretext of a "war on terror" is yet another area of great concern. Amnesty International has been following the cases of people, including refugees, who have been placed at great risk of torture as a result of these actions.

During its tour of the region, the EU should also look for ways to strengthen the judicial institutions that, albeit in different degrees, remain fragile in all Central Asian countries.

"The delegation should bear in mind that in all these countries there are people looking to the EU for help to bring about change and greater freedom. It is important to send them signals of encouragement", added Oosting.

Background:

On Wednesday 28 March an EU high level delegation is travelling to Astana, Kazakhstan to meet with counterparts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, for talks under the framework of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements between the EU and the countries of Central Asia.