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### **CHINA: TORTURE ON THE INCREASE**

Brutal, and sometimes fatal, torture has become endemic in Chinese jails in the last decade with prisoners now suffering far more severe abuses than they did ten years ago, Amnesty International said today.

"The government's continuing campaigns to crush crime and political opposition have fuelled human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, executions and torture," the human rights organization said.

In a 60-page report released today, the organization details dozens of cases, including of women and children, who have been viciously beaten, shackled, shocked with electric cattle prods and tortured in other ways.

"We believe the law-enforcement and justice system in China actually foster torture," Amnesty International said. "Prisoners have very few rights in law and virtually none in practice, leading to many criminal and political suspects and prisoners being abused to force confessions and as punishment."

The organization said that although Chinese law forbids torture and China has ratified the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture, the government has done nothing to provide even the most basic safeguards to protect prisoners and has taken only token steps that have simply not stopped the torture.

Today's report details many different kinds of torture, used in jails across China. Severe beatings and shackling are common, and use of electric cattle prods, which give off powerful electric shocks, is widespread. Other common methods include incarceration in tiny cells, too small to stand up or lie down, or in pitch dark cells without heat, ventilation or sanitation.

One unusually grim method is the "shackle board", used in Hunan province. A wooden door is laid flat on four short legs and prisoners are chained spreadeagled to the door, often for months at a time. Some prisoners have become mentally disturbed and severely affected physically after being shackled to the board for months.

In one particularly harrowing account, a former prisoner told of a torture method in a detention center in Shaanxi in 1990, called "the old ox ploughing the land". Two prisoners were handcuffed together back to back and tied with a rope. The guards then made a group of prisoners pull the rope and run, beating them until they ran faster and faster, dragging the two bound prisoners along the concrete ground behind them.

The "ploughing" continued until the concrete was covered in blood. The back of one of the two prisoners was left as one massive wound; he was given no medication and throughout the winter his back was a mass of rotting flesh. The local procuracy heard of the incident and apparently sent a representative to investigate, but Amnesty International knows of no further action taken.

Though some cases of torture are officially investigated, few such investigations take place and many of the perpetrators escape punishment. In 1991, according to Chinese official sources, over 400 cases of "torture to extract confessions" were investigated and prosecuted. Amnesty International believes this figure represents only a small fraction of the real number of torture cases since few prisoners dare to make complaints for fear of reprisals.

"Prisoners in China have virtually no protection from the torturers," said Amnesty International. "Not even the most basic safeguards apply. Many detainees are held under administrative regulations and have no right of access to lawyers or judges. Those

charged under the criminal law only have access to lawyers at the time of the trial. They are often held incommunicado for months on end after arrest, while the police forces 'confessions' out of them."

"Simply outlawing torture is not enough to prevent it. The government must take effective measures to protect prisoners, such as providing safeguards, setting up independent bodies to investigate all torture allegations impartially and ending the impunity that many prison guards and police enjoy at the moment."

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