

EU-ASYLUM: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL BACKS UNHCR CRITICISM OF EU ASYLUM PROPOSALS

(Brussels 24 November 2003) Amnesty International today backed criticism by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers that proposed EU asylum laws to be discussed at this week's EU Justice and Home Affairs Council may erode international standards.

"The proposed legislation aimed at harmonizing asylum procedures across the EU, which will form the core of the EU's Common Asylum System, is seriously flawed in terms of human rights. Unless the Italian EU Presidency can restore a proper focus on refugee protection, the EU would be better off without this legislation," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office said.

"National governments appear to be competing with each other to see how far they can lower standards of refugee protection in Europe in response to populist pressures. As a result, the EU's Common Asylum System is being held hostage. The proposed legislation would break the EU's own commitments as set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, soon to be part of the new EU Constitution, as well as individual EU governments' responsibilities under international law."

Amnesty International says by agreeing these proposals, EU member states would be clearly signalling that it is acceptable to ignore international standards and shift the burden of refugee protection to other countries.

"There are so many exceptions and derogations within the current proposals on safe third countries, border procedures and the right to remain during an appeal, that the end result is not harmonization, but a green light for all governments to lower standards of refugee protection even further. What sort of message is that for the EU to send to the rest of the world?" Dick Oosting asked.

For recent background papers on these issues, please consult the "documents" page on this web-site.

For further comment/background and interviews:

Amnesty International EU Office (Brussels)

Tel: 32-2-5021499

Fax: 32-2-5025686

Email: amnesty-eu@aieu.be