

Open letter to the Finnish Presidency and to the European Commission

At the start of the Finnish Presidency the EU faces the familiar questions of how to put human rights into practice more effectively in its Common Foreign and Security Policy. Notwithstanding persistent dilemmas, there is a discernible positive thrust with the increasing attention to implementation of the human rights guidelines, the EU's steadily expanding role in crisis management, and the support for an international arms trade treaty, to name some obvious elements. New is the question of how the EU can best contribute to fulfilling the promise of the new UN Human Rights Council that has just started its work.

On the domestic front, however, the EU continues to face pressing human rights challenges which it has yet to address in a credible and convincing manner:

- how to ensure that human rights are upheld more rigorously in EU and Member States' counter-terrorism efforts;
- how to check the deeply problematic human rights impact of the fight against irregular immigration;
- how to address these complex issues in a manner that helps to allay rather than feed the fear and anxiety that is prevalent in our societies.

These dilemmas are reflected in the failure of the recent European Council to shape a meaningful role for the proposed EU Fundamental Rights Agency. They are also acknowledged in the joint operational programme of the Austrian and Finnish Presidencies stating their intention to "work to improve the coherence and consistency of the EU's human rights policy in its internal matters as well as in external affairs".

The mid-term **review of the Hague Programme** will provide an important opportunity to assess the extent to which the values of human rights and the rule of law are being adequately asserted in the realization of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the serious human rights deficit that has become manifest with regard to the dominant issues of the fight against terrorism and against irregular immigration. Given their external ramifications, this risks undermining the credibility of the EU's human rights policy as a whole.

In presenting its analysis and proposals to the incoming Finnish Presidency, Amnesty International thus calls for a **comprehensive review of the EU's human rights policy** in order to address these fundamental questions. Seven years ago, at a time when "EU human rights policy" meant looking at third countries only, the previous Finnish Presidency made history at the October 1999 Tampere summit with a strong human rights impulse for the EU's asylum and immigration policy. Amnesty International believes that it is time to recapture some of that Tampere spirit, and that this should be manifested also by concrete steps to pave the way for **EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights**.

Ahead of the European Commission visit to Helsinki on 3 July 2006, Amnesty International urges the Commission and the Finnish Government in their deliberations to address these key questions and to articulate more precisely how human rights will feature on the EU agenda for the Finnish Presidency.

Yours sincerely,



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Annex:

“The search for a coherent and credible EU human rights policy – Amnesty International’s ten-point programme for the Finnish Presidency of the European Union”