

## Spain accused of ignoring torture victims

Rueters. December 3, 2004.

By Daniel Flynn

MADRID (Reuters) - Spain frequently allows torture of illegal immigrants and suspected ETA members by police to go unpunished and does not grant appropriate compensation to victims, Amnesty International says in a report.

In a study of 450 court cases between 1980 and 2004, the human rights watchdog criticised the chronic slowness of Spain's courts and the frequent impunity given to torturers.

"Internationally, everyone agrees there is a problem of torture and mistreatment in Spain -- except successive Spanish governments," said Esteban Beltran, Amnesty's director in Spain, presenting the report "Spain: Ending the Double Injustice" on Friday.

"Amnesty is calling for an abrupt reversal of the practice of doling out pardons," said Beltran, adding that dozens of officials had received reprieves from torture convictions.

An Interior Ministry spokeswoman had no comment. The previous conservative government, ousted by the Socialists in March, had always denied such allegations.

While saying there was no systematic police torture in Spain, Amnesty identified a growing problem of racist treatment of illegal immigrants.

It also said that the practice of holding incommunicado suspected members of Basque separatist group ETA and suspected al Qaeda militants encouraged torture. EU-applicant Turkey had tighter rules on holding prisoners incommunicado, Beltran said.

Despite the psychological damage inflicted by torture, Amnesty said Spain's courts continued to compensate victims under guidelines for traffic accidents.

In a third of cases, victims received less than 600 euros -- insufficient to cover the cost of medical treatment and therapy.

In the majority of the cases analysed by Amnesty, victims had to wait more than seven years before receiving compensation and in some

instances it took longer than 15 years.

"In relation to compensating the victims of torture, Spain ranks very poorly ... compared with other European countries," Beltran said, citing the example of France which guarantees compensation even if the guilty party cannot pay.

The rights group said victims were often not adequately compensated because their torturers could not be identified.

The report cited the case of a Brazilian immigrant raped in police custody in the Basque city of Bilbao. Although a court found in her favour, her rapists were never identified because none of the officers would cooperate.

Torture of political dissidents was widespread under the 1939-1975 dictatorship of Francisco Franco and concerns over Spain's human rights record played a part in delaying its entry into the European Union until 1986.

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