

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed until 00:01 GMT on 03 October 2016

EU: Time to eradicate the torture trade

The European Parliament should vote in favour of measures strengthening the European Union's landmark regulation combatting the trade in equipment that can be used to torture, ill-treat or execute people, said Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation (Omega).

Final amendments to the torture trade Regulation (EC) 1236/2005 accepted by the EU Council will be debated and voted on by the full European Parliament plenary on Tuesday 4 October.

"The global market is rife with sinister equipment like leg chains and spiked batons which can easily be turned into tools of torture. Introducing tighter EU restrictions on the sale, brokering and promotion of these devices will bring us a step closer to eradicating this shameful trade," said Ara Marcen Naval, Advocate Advisor for Arms Control, Security Trade and Human Rights at Amnesty International.

"For too long companies have been able to profit from human suffering. This vote is an opportunity for the EU to send the message that it will not tolerate torture."

Amnesty International and Omega have campaigned for the closure of loopholes in the current Regulation, including ones that allow EU-based companies and companies trading in the EU to openly promote equipment at EU arms fairs, exhibitions and online, when the import and export of that equipment is banned by the EU.

For example, catalogues promoting banned equipment such as thumbcuffs, spiked batons and weighted leg restraints were distributed at the Milipol exhibition in Paris in November 2015, and a set of weighted leg irons and a spiked shield were physically on display at this event. As of 28 September, the website of German company PKI Electronic Intelligence GmbH [continued to advertise](#) banned 60,000 volt electric stun hand-cuffs with the chilling tagline "You never saw an escaping person stop so quickly!"

The package of amendments which MEPs will vote on includes a range of measures that Amnesty International, Omega and others have been pressing for.

"The Commission, Parliament and member states must now ensure that prohibited goods designed to inflict pain and suffering, or goods which are likely to do so, will no longer be casually displayed at EU trade fairs or promoted online by EU companies," said Dr Michael Crowley of Omega.

“We are calling on all EU bodies, institutions and the 28 member states to ensure that new measures adopted under the strengthened Regulation are fully, effectively and immediately implemented.”

Further positive amendments to the draft Regulation that Amnesty International and Omega supports include:

- An explicit ban on the transit through the EU of equipment specifically designed for torture, ill treatment or execution;
- A ban on brokering activities by EU-based companies when prohibited goods do not touch EU soil;
- A ban on providing training and technical assistance in the use of prohibited equipment; and
- An 'urgency procedure' which will enable the EU to more quickly put in place controls on new types of equipment judged to be inherently abusive

Amnesty International and Omega are calling for further measures to be put in place to implement the objectives of the Regulation. This includes banning EU companies from providing training to police and security forces throughout the world in techniques that could be defined as torture or other ill treatment.

For example, videos of training sessions available on the website of one Czech company show trainees being taught how to apply pressure to the throat of a prisoner in a “choke-hold” restraint technique. Such training is not currently prohibited, even though the technique in question appears to contravene recommendations of the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

Amnesty International and Omega are also calling for EU institutions and member states to take action to stop the global torture trade.

The international trade in security and law enforcement equipment is, in most states, much less stringently controlled than the trade in conventional military weapons and munitions.

“EU leaders are setting strong regional standards with these new rules. These could be an example for other states outside the EU. It’s time for the EU to take a stand and help put an end to the torture trade,” said Ara Marcen-Naval.

Background

The landmark Council Regulation (EC) 1236/2005 is the world’s only legally binding regional mechanism for combatting the trade in “law enforcement” devices that have no practical use other than to torture, ill-treat or execute people, and controlling the trade in devices which may have a legitimate use but which could be readily misused for such purposes.

The European Parliament plenary in Strasbourg (4 October) will debate and vote on a package of amendments agreed between Parliament and Council negotiators earlier this year in informal 'trilogue' discussions. This package has already been voted through the Parliament's International Trade Committee.

****NOTE TO EDITORS****

A stand displaying examples of material advertising torture equipment, found at trade fairs in the EU, will be in the European Parliament in Strasbourg all day on 4 October, located outside the entrance to the canteen.

Experts from Amnesty International and the Omega Research Foundation will be present and available for interview.

A photo call at the stand with Commissioner Malmstrom and the rapporteur, Marietje Schaake MEP, is expected around 16:30. Please contact David Nichols +32 494 876088