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USA: Interrogation techniques amount to torture

Coercive interrogation methods endorsed by members of the US government amount to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and violate international law and the USA's treaty obligations, Amnesty International said today, as it called on the USA to end its practice of holding detainees incommunicado and in secret detention.

Citing current and former officials, today's New York Times claims that Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, an alleged leading member of al-Qa'ida held in an undisclosed location for more than a year, has been subjected to interrogation techniques including "water boarding" in which the prisoner is forcibly pushed under water to the point that he believes he will drown.

"This would be a clear case of torture", Amnesty International said, adding that water submersion is a technique that has been used by countries notorious for their use of torture.

The New York Times states that the techniques used against Khalid Shaikh Mohammed were among a set of secret rules approved by the administration for use against "high value" detainees in the so-called "war on terror".

Separately, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld told a Senate committee yesterday that Pentagon lawyers had approved methods of interrogation in Iraq such as "sleep management", "dietary manipulation" and "stress positions". Such so-called "stress and duress" techniques have been widely alleged by former detainees held in US custody in Afghanistan some of whom were subsequently transferred to Guantánamo Bay.

Under questioning by the committee, Secretary Rumsfeld said that: "Any instructions that have been issued or anything that's been authorized by the Department have been checked by the lawyers" and "deemed to be consistent with the Geneva Conventions".

"These techniques of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, amounting to war crimes, and violate the Convention Against Torture to which the USA is a state party," Amnesty International reiterated.

Amnesty International noted that the Committee Against Torture, the expert body established by the Convention Against Torture to oversee its implementation, has expressly held that restraining detainees in painful positions, hooding, threats, and prolonged sleep deprivation are methods of interrogation which violate the prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

In the past two years, human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have raised this issue at the highest levels of the US administration.

"The US administration still has not learnt that ill-treatment and abuse are a slippery slope to torture and should be totally prohibited", Amnesty International said, reiterating that torture is strictly prohibited in all circumstances, including in times of emergency and war.

"All US detention facilities around the world, holding prisoners captured in the context of the "war on terror", must be opened to independent monitors and all allegations of torture and cruel treatment subjected to vigorous independent investigation."

Public Document

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