

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: ASA 11/015/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 223
13 November 2007

Embargo Date: 13 November 2007 05:01 GMT

Afghanistan: NATO countries at risk of complicity in torture.

"We cannot rule out that torture is going on."

– Norwegian Foreign Ministry Official interviewed by the Norwegian News Agency NTB, 27 July 2007

The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan is exposing detainees to real risks of torture or other ill-treatment by Afghan authorities, says Amnesty International in a report released today.

The report documents how ISAF forces – particularly those from Belgium, Britain, Canada, the Netherlands and Norway – have transferred detainees to Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), despite consistent reports of torture and other ill-treatment by the NDS.

"ISAF states are under an international obligation not to hand over detainees to Afghan authorities where they will be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment," said Claudio Cordone, Senior Director for Research at Amnesty International. "Such transfers should be suspended until effective safeguards are in place."

The UN reiterated its concerns about the NDS as recently as September 2007, when it called for investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by the NDS. Over the past two years, Amnesty International has received repeated reports of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees by the NDS, including being whipped, exposed to extreme cold and deprived of food.

"We were taken to the NDS compound in Kandahar...I was beaten on my back and especially my kidneys with a metal cable... A metal bar was placed under my chained arms and knees and I was hung from the hook on the ceiling and they continued to beat me. I was hung in this position for maybe one hour and lost consciousness." – Testimony given to Amnesty International in December 2005.

The cases highlighted in the report include:

- Detainees reporting being tortured after Canadian forces handed them over to the Afghan authorities;
- The Belgian and Norwegian governments losing track of transferred detainees;
- Difficulties encountered by the British and Dutch forces in ensuring independent monitoring of detainees in Afghan custody.

The report examines Memorandums of Understanding and other bilateral agreements between the Afghan government and ISAF forces including those from Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK.

"The obligation of ISAF states to protect individuals from such treatment cannot be discharged by relying upon bilateral agreements," said Claudio Cordone. "These agreements are supposed to ensure that

detainees are treated in accordance with international standards but have proved to be inadequate.”

Amnesty International puts forward a number of recommendations including:

- ISAF must temporarily suspend all transfer of detainees to Afghan authorities and hold them in their custody until effective safeguards are in place.
- ISAF contributing countries should promote the reform of the Afghan detention system and explore the feasibility of placing international staff within Afghan detention facilities in order to monitor and train new Afghan detention officials.
- The Afghan government must publish the secret Presidential decree governing the operations of the NDS and take steps to separate its current functions of detention, investigation and prosecution.
- The Afghan government should ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to visit Afghanistan, including detention facilities under the control of the NDS.
- Independent monitors should be given unrestricted and unhindered access to all detention centres and unsupervised access to all detainees.

From 13 November, the report, *Afghanistan: Detainees transferred to torture: ISAF complicity?* will be available at www.amnesty.org

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>