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EXPOSING RENDITIONS

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(Brussels, 5 April 2006) In a new report published today, "USA - Below the radar: Secret flights to torture and 'disappearance'", Amnesty International gives comprehensive information concerning rendition flights and describes the conditions under which victims were held.

The human rights organisation has analysed the movements of airplanes directly linked to the CIA between 2001 and 2005, specifically, the aircraft that transported well known rendition victims such as Khaled el-Masri, Maher Arar and Abu Omar. The analysis shows that these airplanes often used European airspace, although it does not prove that they were always transporting prisoners.

Amnesty International has interviewed several victims of rendition. Their testimonies were coherent and plausible when checked against factual data such as flight information. Also consistent was the description, by every single one, of incidents of torture and other ill-treatment.

Only three Yemeni citizens have allowed their testimony to be made public. These men were "disappeared" for 18 months during which time they were held in four unknown detention centres. As they were blindfolded during the transfers, they do not know the location of these prisons but the length of the flights, as well as the prayer schedules they were given, suggest that they were held in Djibouti, Afghanistan and in Eastern Europe.

As a result of renditions, today several people are still "disappeared" although it is difficult to assess the full scope of the rendition program because families are often reluctant to report missing relatives for fear of reprisals.

Amnesty International's new report highlights the case of the German citizen Muhammad Zammar who "disappeared" in Morocco in 2001. He was reportedly taken to Syria on the CIA's Gulfstream V jet N 379P. In 2004 former detainees of the Syrian prison where Zammar was allegedly held described his cell as a "tomb" and his condition as "skeletal". He last contacted his family in June 2005 and since then neither his relatives, nor the German authorities, have information of his current whereabouts or even whether he is still alive.

Once again Amnesty International calls on all Member States to ensure that European airports and European airspace are not used to support or facilitate renditions. With or without diplomatic assurances, this practice is not about bringing people to justice, it leads to torture and puts lives at risk.

For further comment/background and interviews:

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