

AI Index: PRE 01/085/2008
14 March 2008

USA: New account sheds light on CIA disappearances and ‘black sites’

Amnesty International today revealed in a new report further details of the cruelty and illegality of the CIA programme of secret detentions and enforced disappearances – a program re-authorized by President Bush in June 2007.

The details come in the form of interviews given exclusively to Amnesty International by 31-year-old Yemeni national Khaled Abdu Ahmed Saleh al-Maqtari, one of the men most recently released from secret detention. Initially a “ghost detainee” at Abu Ghraib, he was transferred to CIA custody in Afghanistan, then held in unknown locations and in complete isolation for over two and a half years, without charge or trial or access to any form of due process. His statements include numerous allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

“Khaled al-Maqtari’s account sheds more light on the US’s unlawful conduct in the ‘war on terror’,” said Anne FitzGerald, Senior Advisor at Amnesty International, who interviewed Khaled al-Maqtari. “He describes being subjected to international crimes such as enforced disappearance and torture, yet these allegations have never been investigated. The secrecy surrounding the program goes hand in hand with a complete absence of accountability.”

Khaled al-Maqtari was detained when US army soldiers raided a suspected arms market in Fallujah, Iraq, in January 2004, arresting at least 60 people. He was transferred to the infamous Abu Ghraib prison as an unregistered “ghost detainee”. He has recounted a regime of beatings, sleep deprivation, suspension upside-down in painful positions, intimidation by dogs, induced hypothermia and other forms of torture.

He said that on one occasion, after being beaten by three men in a small room, he was forced to stand naked on a chair in front of a powerful air conditioner, holding up a full case of bottled water. He was periodically drenched in cold water, which made him shiver so hard he could barely remain standing. Khaled al-Maqtari said he was also suspended by his feet, with his arms still cuffed behind his back, while a pulley was used to lower him up and down over the water crate.

After nine days of interrogation in Abu Ghraib, Khaled al-Maqtari was taken by plane to a secret CIA detention facility in Afghanistan, where he was held for a further three months. Flight records obtained by Amnesty International corroborated that a jet operated by a CIA front company left Baghdad International Airport nine days after al-Maqtari’s arrest, heading for Khwaja Rawash airport in Kabul.

While in Afghanistan, he said, he was subjected to further torture and ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement, the use of stress positions, sleep deprivation, exposure to extremes of hot and cold, prolonged shackling, sensory deprivation and disruption with bright lighting and loud music or sound effects

constantly channeled into his cell.

As he told Amnesty International: “It was not really music but noise to scare you, like from one of those scary movies... I was scared, there were no dogs but there was noise there. Whenever you try to sleep, they bang on the door loudly and violently.”

Khaled al-Maqtari also told Amnesty International that during the lapses in the music or sound effects he began to speak to other detainees, and figured out there were about 20 others being held in the cells around him, including Majid Khan, one of the “high value” detainees transferred from secret CIA custody to military detention in Guantánamo Bay in September 2006.

In late April 2004, Khaled al-Maqtari and a number of his fellow detainees were transferred to another CIA “black site”, possibly in Eastern Europe. He was held there for a further 28 months, before being sent to Yemen where he was detained until May 2007.

“At no point during his 32-month confinement was Khaled al-Maqtari told where he was or why. He did not have access to lawyers, relatives, the International Committee of the Red Cross or any person other than his interrogators and the personnel involved in his detention and transfer. This clearly violates the US’s international obligations. The US government has a case to answer,” said Anne FitzGerald.

Khaled al-Maqtari is now back in Yemen, living with the effects of prolonged psychological and physical torture. He has not received any reparation from US authorities, who have yet to acknowledge his detention. The abuses that have affected him most, he said, were the years of endless isolation, his total uncertainty about his future, the constant monitoring by cameras, and his segregation from the outside world, particularly the lack of contact with his family.

Amnesty International calls on the US authorities to end the use of secret detention; hold accountable those responsible for abuses carried out under the program; make known the names, fate and whereabouts of all individuals held in the context of the so-called “war on terror”; and charge any of them who are still held with recognizable criminal offences and bring them to trial in independent courts or release them.

The report “USA: A case to answer - From Abu Ghraib to secret CIA custody: The case of Khaled al-Maqtari” will be available from 14 March at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/013/2008/en>