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Italy: Minister of Justice must forward CIA extradition requests to US authorities

Amnesty International today called on Italian Minister of Justice Clemente Mastella to forward to the US authorities the extradition requests for 26 US citizens, most of them thought to be CIA agents. The requests have been issued against them in connection with the abduction of Muslim Cleric Abu Omar in February 2003 from Italy to Egypt.

Abu Omar, of Egyptian nationality and resident in Italy, was abducted from a street in Milan four years ago and sent to Egypt as part of the US-led programme of "rendition". On arrival in Egypt Abu Omar was immediately detained and allegedly subjected to torture; he has recently been released without charge. A Milan court issued extradition requests in July 2006 and indictments against the 26 US suspects in February 2007.

"By forwarding the extradition requests, Minister Clemente Mastella will demonstrate Italy's willingness to fight human rights violations committed in the 'War on Terror' and to bring suspected perpetrators to justice," said Anders Dahlbeck, Amnesty International's researcher on Italy.

"The Minister of Justice will also demonstrate Italy's compliance with the European Parliament resolution on renditions adopted in February 2007 which specifically called for extradition processes to be fast-tracked."

Amnesty International has repeatedly called on all European governments to collaborate with judicial investigations into those responsible for the renditions that have taken place in Europe. When making the decision on whether or not to forward the extradition requests, Amnesty International urges the Minister of Justice to keep in mind international human rights laws and standards, including those set out in the UN Convention against Torture, to which Italy is a state party.

On 16 February 2007 an Italian judge also issued indictments against seven Italian citizens, primarily operatives of the Italian security services, SISMI, in connection with the abduction of Abu Omar. However, Amnesty International is concerned that the Italian government may refuse to reveal all the possible evidence about the involvement of the CIA and SISMI operatives in the abduction and rendition of Abu Omar. The Italian government has stated in writing before the Italian Constitutional Court that several pieces of evidence in the proceedings against them are protected by state secrecy and therefore should not be used in the legal proceedings.

"If the disclosure of evidence of possible criminal activities is blocked, this could result in impunity for Italian security services agents who may have engaged in grave abuses of human rights," stated Anders Dahlbeck.

"As a matter of principle, Italy must not hide behind national security considerations to cover up possible crimes of state agents. It must acknowledge its responsibility and facilitate the process of justice. This will be a measure to prevent renditions taking place in the future," he said.

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Public Document

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