

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **USA: Open letter to the US Senate on the nomination of Alberto Gonzales**

In an open letter to be handed to Senators today, Amnesty International is urging the United States Senate to refrain from voting on the nomination of Alberto Gonzales to the position of US Attorney General pending his full and unambiguous responses to outstanding questions about torture and ill-treatment.

"Having heard the persistent allegations of abuse against detainees in US custody in Afghanistan, Guantánamo, Iraq, and secret locations elsewhere, the world is watching to see how the USA will act to ensure redress, accountability, and non-recurrence. Such action is crucial, as is the commitment to it of the individual nominated to become the country's chief law enforcement officer," said Amnesty International.

The closeness of last week's vote by the Judiciary Committee to pass the nomination of Alberto Gonzales to the full Senate for its consideration shows the depth of concern that remains in Congress on the question of torture and ill-treatment and Gonzales' record and position on it.

Such concern is justified by ambiguities and evasions in Alberto Gonzales's responses to Senators. His unwillingness, for example, even to describe as torture interrogation techniques as severe as "water-boarding" is disturbing -- water submersion to the point of perceived drowning clearly constitutes torture. Troubling also was the degree to which he relied upon presidential assertions rather than on his own position on the unequivocal international prohibition against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

The Attorney General must be prepared to assert the unconditional prohibition of torture, even if this were to conflict with domestic law interpretations or other views within government. There is no room for equivocation.

"Torture and ill-treatment are prohibited at all times and in all places; in wartime and in peacetime; against one's own nationals, and against the nationals of another country; on one's own sovereign territory or on the sovereign territory of another nation. Any exception to this rule, let alone one formulated by a country as powerful as the United States of America, would lead to an unraveling of a global compact that recognizes torture and ill-treatment to always be wrong. Such an unraveling would be dangerous to us all." said Amnesty International.

There is little doubt that, under the current circumstances, the confirmation of Alberto Gonzales as Attorney General would send a message out to the world that the US government is unapologetic and unconcerned about a growing perception that the USA is a state that is prepared to use torture and other cruel, inhuman

or degrading treatment. Tolerance for torture and ill-treatment should have no place at the helm of the US justice system.

For a full copy of the open letter, please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR510312005>

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