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USA/ Iraq: Abuses without accountability a year after Abu Ghraib

One year after the Abu Ghraib photographs shocked the world, those tortured by US soldiers have still to receive redress and evidence of abuse of Iraqis by their own authorities continues.

"People around the world will be recalling the horrific images they saw a year ago and wondering what happened to those prisoners. Did they receive redress for the crimes against them? A few low-ranking US soldiers have been prosecuted or disciplined, but what was the role of those higher up, including, for example, the US Secretary of Defense?" said Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

While a handful of US soldiers have been court-martialled for their role in high-profile abuses, senior administration officials have remained free from independent scrutiny, despite having authorized practices amounting to torture or ill-treatment. Not one US agent has been charged under the USA's Anti-Torture Act or War Crimes Act, whether for abuses committed in Abu Ghraib or Camp Bucca in Iraq, Bagram in Afghanistan, or elsewhere.

"The US government must set up an independent inquiry into all aspects of the USA's 'war on terror' detention and interrogation practices and allow independent monitors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and UN experts, access to all detainees in US custody," called Irene Khan.

"Torture and ill-treatment are never acceptable. By flouting these standards governments destroy the very values they claim to be protecting. When a major power like the USA resorts to torture or ill-treatment, other countries may see a green light to follow suit."

Torture was rife under Saddam Hussein and the war in Iraq was meant to bring about a new chapter in human rights, but instead Amnesty International has received reports of detainees being tortured by the Iraqi police. In February 2005 three men died in custody after being arrested at a police checkpoint. The bodies of Majbal 'Adnan Latif, his brother 'Ali, and 'Aidi Mahassan Lifteh were found three days later, bearing clear marks of torture from beatings and electric shocks.

In another case, 'Ali Safar al-Bawy, an Iraqi resident in Sweden, stated that he was beaten and given an electric shock so intense it threw him across the room at the Iraqi Interior Ministry. He had been picked up by police on a family trip to see relatives in July 2004 and was detained without charge for three weeks. He was blindfolded and interrogated. Fellow detainees told 'Ali that US interrogators at the Interior Ministry were aware of torture used there, and even took part in it.

During his detention 'Ali saw child detainees, some as young as seven years old, with their mothers. Among the children were Qusay, aged 12, and his brother aged 16. Late in the evening guards would take Qusay away and sexually abuse him, according to 'Ali.

In another alarming development in Iraq, a national television channel, Al-Iraqiya, is broadcasting "confessions" by alleged "terrorists". Amnesty International is particularly concerned about such "confessions" as detainees are invariably held incommunicado. People who have watched the shows say the detainees show signs of torture, including bruises and swollen faces. Hardly any Iraqi official has been prosecuted for serious abuses of detainees.

Amnesty International calls for the anniversary of the publication of the Abu Ghraib photographs to be marked by the strongest condemnation of all forms of torture by the US and Iraqi governments. One year on, the US authorities must establish an independent investigation into the abuses and bring the perpetrators to justice.

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