

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## External Document

AI Index: AMR 51/101/2005 (Public)  
News Service No: 171  
22 June 2005

## **USA: Close Guantánamo and disclose the rest** **Opinion piece by Irene Khan, Amnesty International Secretary General**

History is littered with people who remained silent in the face of abuse. In doing so the only cause they helped was to allow more abuse to take place with impunity. Amnesty International is not prepared to join their ranks.

When we published our Report 2005, an annual assessment of global human rights abuses in 149 countries around the world, we included a section on the United States and highlighted, among the criticisms, US practices in the “war on terror,” including indefinite detention without charge or trial and torture.

This triggered an unprecedented verbal attack from senior figures in the Administration, including President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers.

The language used in our Report 2005 was clear. We were not suggesting, as some have interpreted it, that Soviet gulags and Guantánamo are mirror-equivalent abuses. Our argument was that both are the symbols of human rights abuse by superpowers in their respective eras.

The mistreatment of detainees at Guantánamo is a disgrace to the best US values as much as to international standards. A detention centre in which detainees are held virtually incommunicado, without charge, trial or access should be condemned by the American people and all those concerned with truth, justice and freedom.

The US actions are also a propaganda gift to armed groups that carry out brutal acts of violence, and a distraction from the need to ensure that such people are brought to proper justice.

But Guantánamo is not alone. It is just the visible tip of an iceberg of abuse, the most notorious link in a chain of detention camps ranging from Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan to prisons in Iraq and elsewhere.

Evidence and allegations of abuse, torture and murder continue to seep out of this shadowy network of detention centers. Yet despite concern at home and abroad, the Administration has failed to carry out a full independent investigation.

The fact is that US interrogation and detention policies and practices in the context of the “war on terror” have deliberately and systematically breached the absolute ban on torture and ill-treatment inscribed in international treaties. Donald Rumsfeld personally approved a December 2002 memorandum that

permitted unlawful interrogation techniques including stress positions, prolonged isolation, stripping and the use of dogs at Guantánamo Bay.

This cavalier attitude towards internationally agreed principles of justice and freedom is unlawful and is doing immense damage to the framework of human rights and to the moral authority of the US to champion human rights. It is sending a signal to repressive governments around the world that some abuses, including torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, are acceptable.

Amnesty International has carefully compiled numerous reports over the past few years. We have published hundreds of pages of evidence and allegations of serious human rights abuse by US agents in the “war on terror”. The US Administration has failed to respond to any of these reports, in stark contrast to its rhetorical and defensive response to the launch of our Report 2005.

The Administration clearly feels that attack is the best form of defence. That is fine. After more than 40 years of denouncing human rights abuse wherever it occurs, Amnesty International has become used to being attacked from governments of all types and forms. It usually shows that we are on target.

What is not fine is the failure of the Administration to address the substance or detail of AI’s concerns. It does not matter when Dick Cheney says that he doesn’t take Amnesty International seriously. But it does matter whether he and his colleagues take human rights seriously.

The current debate provides the Administration with the perfect opportunity to prove that it is prepared to close the rhetoric-reality gap and to address the substantive concerns that Amnesty International and other human rights organisations have repeatedly highlighted over the past few years.

President Bush, the challenge is clear. Close Guantánamo detention camp and charge the detainees under US law in US courts or release them. Disclose the rest and support a full, independent investigation into US policies and practices on detention and interrogation including torture and ill-treatment.

Reassert the basic principles of justice, truth and freedom in which Americans take so much pride. Make the USA a true force for good in a divided, dangerous world.

Public Document

\*\*\*\*\*

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>