

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: POL 30/034/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 313
18 November 2005

Largest-ever gathering of former Guantánamo prisoners and prisoners' families: US government must give independent UN experts full access to Guantánamo

Joint Statement by Amnesty International and Reprieve

Amnesty International and Reprieve today called on the US government to stop blocking meaningful United Nations access to its Guantánamo detention centre and agree to access to all prisoners. The organizations were responding to the passing of a midnight deadline for the US government to agree to terms for a visit to Guantánamo by five independent experts of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Amnesty International and Reprieve made the call as they announced the largest ever gathering of former "war on terror" prisoners and their families to highlight an increasingly globalized network of torture and ill-treatment. The three-day conference in London, this Saturday through Monday, also brings together international legal and medical experts and leading human rights campaigners to inform and encourage action against torture and the practices that lead to it, such as secret detentions and renditions.

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan said:

"Denying meaningful access to those held in Guantánamo Bay is totally unacceptable. Guantánamo is just the visible tip of an iceberg of abuse, the most notorious link in a chain of detention camps including Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, prisons in Iraq and secret facilities elsewhere. Through the courageous testimonies of former prisoners and prisoners' families, our conference this weekend will highlight how Guantánamo has become the epicentre of a shadow justice system supported by the subversive use of prolonged detentions and the handing over of prisoners to countries known to practice torture."

Reprieve's Legal Director, Clive Stafford Smith, who is acting on behalf of some 40 Guantánamo Bay detainees, said:

"The conference begins on the 100th day of the prisoners' hunger strike. I recently returned from Guantánamo and have just received an unclassified statement from Shaker Aamer, the British resident and father of four British children, where he writes that he has been so abused and humiliated that he wants the US military to stop force feeding prisoners and allow him to chart his own destiny and die. The British government should be ashamed of itself, refusing to lift a hand to help the ten British residents still being held there. At the conference, we will see the collateral damage of the Guantánamo experiment - the torture, the fatherless children, and the abdication of the rule of law."

Amnesty International and Reprieve recognize that protecting civilians is a government's duty, but fighting terror with terror has been a catastrophe. Respect for universal human rights is the most potent weapon in the "war on terror". Fair trials and an absolute ban on torture are the only way to properly underpin our security.