

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Afghanistan: Amnesty International condemns the disregard for human life

"Recent allegations of abuse of an Afghan police officer in August 2003 by US soldiers in Gardez highlight the imperative need for a transparent and accountable investigation into reports of human rights violations," Amnesty International said today. Amnesty International calls on the US and Afghan government to investigate all deaths in custody, including the deaths of two Afghans in US custody in December 2002, and for the results to be made public. Both governments must ensure that all officers involved in allegations of torture and misconduct are suspended pending the outcome of investigations. This should include those individuals responsible for the ill-treatment of prisoners and lengthy incommunicado detentions at detention facilities run by regional commanders, such as Shiberghan jail run by General Dostum in the north of Afghanistan.

Amnesty International also expressed concern that a recent request by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to be allowed access to US managed detention facilities in Afghanistan has been refused. The US military has repeatedly denied access to independent human rights bodies, including Amnesty International. We urge the US military in Afghanistan to ensure access is now granted. We also urge the Afghan government to give full support to the AIHRC in their request to gain access to detention facilities.

Amnesty International urges the US and Afghan governments to:

initiate and investigate allegations of abuse in Bagram, Kandahar, Gardez, Shiberghan and any other detention facilities across Afghanistan. This must include US and Afghan controlled detention facilities. The relevant authorities should also make public the numbers of detainees held at each facility and begin immediate classification of prisoners

suspend from duty any personnel alleged to have been responsible for human rights violations involved pending the outcome of the investigation and any criminal and/or disciplinary proceedings

end the practice of incommunicado detention and to give detainees immediate access to their families and lawyers

ensure the ICRC and independent human rights organisations, including the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International, are given regular access to all places of detention

ensure that any victims of torture or inhumane treatment receive full reparations including compensation as required under international law.

Background information

Amnesty International has received consistent reports of torture and abuse of detainees held in US military bases across Afghanistan during the past two and a half years. Whilst Amnesty International welcomes official statements from the US authorities that the allegations are being taken seriously, to date, fundamental principles of law and human rights continue to be violated.

Since the events of 11 September 2001, former prisoners who have been held at US Air Bases in Bagram and Kandahar in Afghanistan have given testimony to Amnesty International of the torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment to which they were subjected to in US custody in Afghanistan. A former Guantanamo detainee recalled to Amnesty International in February 2004 his detention in Bagram and Kandahar in 2002. His testimony echoes other former detainees who claim to have been subjected to excessive and cruel use of shackles, sleep deprivation, blindfolding and being forced to repeatedly crawl on their knees from their cell to the interrogation room. None of the former detainees have been given the opportunity to challenge the lawfulness of their detention, have had any access to lawyers and families or were brought before any court.