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USA: Bradley Manning trial underscores serious accountability failures

US authorities have failed to deliver justice for serious human rights violations committed in the context of counter-terror operations dating back more than a decade, Amnesty International said as the sentencing phase opened today in the military trial of Army Private Bradley Manning.

Manning, who exposed potential breaches of international humanitarian law and other violations by US forces, could face up to 136 years in prison after [being convicted of 20 separate charges](#) – including theft of government property and violations of the Espionage Act.

“There’s a stunning contrast between the extraordinarily severe sentence Bradley Manning could receive and the leniency or complete impunity enjoyed by those responsible for the types of grave human rights violations he exposed,” said Widney Brown, Senior Director of International Law and Policy at Amnesty International.

“It’s outrageous that the USA has failed to hold perpetrators criminally accountable despite credible allegations of torture, enforced disappearances and other crimes under international law in the context of counter-terror operations since September 11, 2001.

“While Manning could face more than a century behind bars, numerous high-level officials have never faced even the threat of investigations – in effect they have been let off scot-free. Even in cases where low-ranking soldiers have been convicted, they’ve received very light sentences.”

For example, high-ranking officials avoided investigation for the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison and elsewhere in Iraq in 2003-2004. While 11 low-ranking soldiers were sentenced to prison terms after being convicted in courts martial, they have all since been released. The Brigadier General in charge of the detention facility was reprimanded for dereliction of duty and demoted to Colonel.

No criminal charges have ever been made in relation to the US secret detention programme where enforced disappearance and torture were authorized at the highest level of government. Details of the programme remain classified.

“The US Attorney General is duty-bound to investigate these serious crimes under international law and bring those responsible to justice,” said Brown.

“The ongoing failure to do so is a festering injustice and a blight on the United States’ human rights record.”

Amnesty International will continue to monitor the sentencing phase of Manning’s trial in the coming days and weeks.

Before handing down her sentence, the judge will hear Manning’s explanation of the motives for his actions. [He was not able to present a public interest defence](#) during the earlier phase of the trial, but he may be able to offer his reasons for the disclosures he made as a mitigating factor now..

She will also hear the testimony of more than 40 witnesses brought by the prosecution and defence.