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Lithuania: Re-open secret prison investigation now

Lithuania must immediately reinstate the criminal investigation into its involvement in the US-led rendition and secret detention programmes, Amnesty International said today in a new report.

Unlock the Truth in Lithuania: Investigate Secret Prisons Now documents developments since the authorities admitted that Lithuania hosted two secret CIA detention facilities between 2002 and 2006. It also provides information on Lithuanian involvement in rendition operations and suggests new critical lines of inquiry that must be pursued, including allegations that Abu Zubaydah, currently detained at Guantanamo Bay, had been held in a CIA black site in Lithuania.

The organization is also calling for Lithuania to investigate links to Poland and Romania, where other secret CIA prisons are alleged to have been established.

Citing the need to protect state secrets, the Lithuanian Prosecutor General closed the criminal investigation into secret CIA detention sites on Lithuanian territory in January 2011 without making any information regarding the investigation public.

“The Lithuanian authorities should not hide behind the blanket claim of ‘state secrecy’ to prevent allegations of disappearance and torture from being properly investigated. No one has been held accountable for helping the USA to construct these secret sites or for any violations that may have occurred in them,” said Julia Hall, Amnesty International’s expert on counterterrorism and human rights in Europe.

“The Lithuanian authorities must reopen their investigation into these operations, including the activities of US officials, and hold accountable those responsible for complicity in all abuses that have taken place.”

Lithuania was the first country in Europe to admit that it hosted two secret prisons and that officials collaborated with US intelligence agencies, following a parliamentary inquiry in December 2009.

As part of the US-led programmes, from late 2001 until 2006, a number of individuals were illegally detained and transferred to secret facilities in third countries where many of them were beaten, deprived of sleep and food and otherwise ill-treated. Some so-called “high value” detainees were subjected to waterboarding (mock drowning).

“Governments ignored their international obligations, state officials broke the law. As a result people suffered – suspects were snatched from the streets of towns and villages and were tortured with impunity, while their families were left clueless about their fate,” said Julia Hall.

“While the Lithuanian government stands alone as having publicly acknowledged that it permitted the CIA to establish secret prisons on its territory, it remains solidly in the pack of European states that have failed miserably at investigating - and holding any state official accountable for - the human rights

violations that are known to have occurred in such sites,” Julia Hall said.

In face of the refusal so far by the Prosecutor General to re-open the investigation, non-governmental organizations are finding ways to seek additional information from a range of Lithuanian government agencies and other sources regarding state officials’ and agencies’ cooperation with the CIA between 2002 and 2006.

Non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, the Vilnius-based Human Rights Monitoring Institute, and the London-based Reprieve and Interights have uncovered new data about rendition flights and related links between landings in Lithuania and other European countries.

Amnesty International challenges the Lithuanian authorities to investigate, in particular:

- The allegations that Abu Zubaydah had been held in Lithuania, including a February 2005 flight from Morocco to Vilnius uncovered by London-based NGO Reprieve.
- Aircraft landings in Lithuania in September 2004 and July 2005 which may have been part of the US-led rendition and secret detention programmes.
- Links between aircraft landings in Lithuania and a number of other European countries, including Poland.

“There is enough information in the public domain to make it imperative for the criminal investigation to be re-opened. The Lithuanian authorities hold the key to unlocking the whole truth about their country’s role in the rendition and secret detention programmes,” Julia Hall said.