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“Disappeared?”: Accountability for CIA Secret Detention Centres in Lithuania

(Vilnius) With a new victim claiming that he was held in Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) secret detention in Lithuania, Amnesty International is urging authorities in Vilnius to renew and redouble their efforts to investigate the country’s involvement in the US-sponsored rendition and secret detention programmes.

On 13 September, the London-based organization, Redress, and Vilnius-based Human Rights Monitoring Institute lodged a complaint with the Lithuanian Prosecutor General on behalf of Mustafa al-Hawsawi, a Saudi national currently detained at Guantanamo Bay who Redress claims was held in secret detention in Lithuania sometime between 2004 and 2006.

“The Lithuanian government has said time and again that if fresh information is presented, it will consider re-opening the previous investigation. Well, here it is,” said Julia Hall, Amnesty International’s expert on counter-terrorism and human rights.

“But let’s be clear: this new case is not the only one that requires the Prosecutor General’s attention. Any and all victims of these practices have the right to effective redress for the violations they suffered as a result of being illegally transferred, tortured under interrogation and disappeared into secret prisons.”

Amnesty International is in Lithuania this week, with NGOs Reprieve, Redress, and the Human Rights Monitoring Institute, to meet with government and civil society actors to call for accountability for Lithuanian collaboration with the US counter-terrorism operations.

A previous criminal investigation by the Prosecutor General into acknowledged CIA secret prisons on Lithuanian territory was closed in January 2011 amidst claims of state secrecy. Amnesty International condemned the premature closure of the investigation on dubious procedural grounds.

Later that year the London-based NGO Interights filed new information with the Lithuanian Prosecutor General on behalf of Abu Zubaydah, a stateless Palestinian, also currently detained at Guantanamo Bay. At that time Interights and Amnesty International, called on the Prosecutor General to re-open the criminal investigation, but the prosecutor refused.

“The Lithuanians utterly failed to conduct an effective investigation the first time, despite having acknowledged that secret sites were established, and then ignored new information in Abu Zubaydah’s case” Hall added. “The Prosecutor General needs to finish the job now by thoroughly investigating all the circumstances surrounding al-Hawsawi’s and Abu Zubaydah’s claims and the broader context of Lithuania’s complicity in the CIA operations.”

Lithuania currently holds the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In September 2012, the European Parliament (EP) called on all EU countries to investigate their roles in the CIA

rendition and secret detention programmes. Following an EP delegation visit to Lithuania which examined the secret sites, the resolution urged the Lithuanian authorities to re-open the investigation.

“It is imperative that Lithuania be a standard-bearer for human rights and the rule of law, as it holds the EU presidency,” said Julia Hall.

“Stalling on accountability for its involvement in torture and disappearance sends a dangerous message that the EU, indeed the world, cannot afford.”