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Lithuania admits existence of secret prison

For the first time a European government has admitted that a secret “black site” existed on its territory, Amnesty International said today after a Lithuanian parliamentary committee concluded that a CIA secret prison operated in Lithuania during the US-led “war on terror”.

“Confirmation of the existence of a secret prison in Lithuania marks a modern low point for human rights protection in Europe,” said Julia Hall, Amnesty International’s expert on counter-terrorism in Europe. “But the Lithuanian inquiry signals a turning point in the quest for the truth about what role European states played in helping the USA in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks. Other European governments should take note and commit to full investigations of similar serious allegations.”

The Lithuanian parliamentary Committee on National Security and Defence issued a report, which stated that officials from the Lithuanian State Security Department assisted in constructing a secret prison for terrorist suspects on the country’s territory. Many detainees held at such secret sites were victims of enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment by US agents, often with the cooperation and assistance of foreign governments.

The committee concluded that CIA airplanes had landed in Lithuania without border checks and claimed that Lithuanian State Security Department officials had failed to notify the president or the prime minister in violation of Lithuanian law.

“The Lithuanian government should have known what its own agencies were doing and is ultimately responsible for the secret prison and any human rights violations that may have taken place there.”

“The inquiry’s findings are only a first step toward accountability,” said Julia Hall. “The investigation in Lithuania should continue and those persons responsible for any involvement in the secret site must be identified and prosecuted.”

Poland and Romania have also been named by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe as allegedly having hosted secret detention facilities for the CIA.

“It is high time that European governments review and tighten civilian control over intelligence and security agencies. It is not enough for governments to claim that they did not know what their security apparatus was up to,” said Julia Hall.

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