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USA: Amnesty welcomes UN call to close Guantánamo Bay – but it is tip of iceberg

Amnesty International welcomes today's United Nations report calling for the closure of the US military detention centre at Guantánamo Bay and urges governments, human rights defenders and its members around the world to send a clear message to the US government that it is time for Guantánamo to go.

The UN experts also concluded that interrogation techniques authorized for use at the facility violate the Convention against Torture; that international human rights law is applicable to the facility and that the US is obliged to either bring the detainees to trial under US law or release them.

Susan Lee, Director of Amnesty International's Americas Programme said: "The report confirms concerns which AI has repeatedly raised with the US government. We have consistently called for the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay to be closed. The US can no longer make the case, morally or legally, for keeping it open."

Guantánamo Bay is just the tip of the iceberg. The United States also operates detention facilities at Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan, Abu Ghraib and elsewhere in Iraq and has been implicated in the use of secret detention facilities in other countries, also known as 'black sites'.

All these facilities, including Guantánamo Bay, must be opened to independent scrutiny. All detainees should have access to the courts and should be treated humanely. These are basic principles that cannot be overridden even in time of war or national emergency.

To date the US has rejected any independent inquiry into its overseas detention facilities, nor has Washington been prepared to cooperate with a Council of Europe investigation into 'rendition' of terrorism suspects.

The selective disregard for international law by the United States in the context of the 'war on terror' has enormous influence over the rest of the world. When the US commits serious human rights violations it sends a signal to abusive governments that these practices are permissible. This is why Guantánamo Bay is so important: it tells other governments that they can commit human rights violations in the name of counter-terrorism too.

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