

AI Index: PRE 01/006/2009  
09 January 2009

## **USA: Amnesty International asks Barack Obama to set date for closing Guantánamo**

On the eve of the seventh anniversary of the first transfers to the US detention centre at Guantánamo Bay, Amnesty International is calling on President-elect Barack Obama to announce a date for its closure promptly after taking office -- and make a reality of his commitment to end the human rights violations that have been the hallmark of the USA's counter-terror policies and practices over the last seven years.

The human rights organization also called on the US President-elect to support an independent commission of inquiry into human rights violations committed as part of the "war on terror" by or on behalf of the USA, in order to ensure accountability and signal a fundamental shift in the USA's counter-terror policies.

"We are not asking the impossible. Barack Obama has already stated his determination to undo some of the wrongs authorised by the US government in the name of national security and we are asking him to turn this commitment into a reality," said Irene Khan, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"We welcome the prioritization given to the issue of Guantánamo," said Irene Khan. "The closure of Guantánamo would mark the beginning of a clean break from past detention policies, but only if it is done in a way that fully meets the USA's international obligations. The devil will now be in the detail: there must be no re-creation of Guantánamo by any other name in any other place."

US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has asked his staff to draw up plans for the closure of Guantánamo, which he expects to be a high priority for the new administration. This needs to include a comprehensive plan for the future of the detainees. Any plan to close Guantánamo must also include the immediate abandoning of trials by military commissions; any subsequent trials should be conducted in the ordinary civilian courts.

Other countries should facilitate the closure of the Guantánamo detention centre by offering humanitarian protection to detainees who are cleared for release but cannot be returned to their own countries for fear that they would suffer torture or persecution there. A number of European Union (EU) states, including Germany and Portugal, have voiced support for the idea of accepting detainees in the EU, and the European Union is discussing the adoption of a common approach.

"Guantánamo has been part of a detention strategy under which the USA has conducted a systematic seven-year assault on basic human rights – such as the right to a fair trial and to humane treatment – in the name of counter-terrorism," said Irene Khan. "It is time for a new approach from the US, but other countries also have a crucial part to play in helping to close down this detention centre."

During his first 100 days in office, Amnesty International is calling on the US President-elect to undertake concrete human rights reforms, including to announce details of the plan for the closure of the detention

centre at Guantánamo Bay with a relatively short timeline; to issue a Presidential order banning torture and other ill-treatment, as defined under international law; and to ensure an independent commission to investigate abuses committed by the US government in its “war on terror” is set up.

Approximately 250 people are currently held in Guantánamo. Some have been detained there for over six years.

Amnesty International was one of the first organizations to call for the closure of Guantánamo. On 11 January, activists, supporters and members of Amnesty International in over 35 countries around the world will again demand that the USA changes course on its detention policies in the context of counter terrorism.

**Note to Editors**

As part of its 100-day campaign, on Thursday 15 January Amnesty International will launch an online viral highlighting the expectations being placed on the incoming administration of President-elect Barack Obama and Amnesty International's key demands on the new administration. The viral will be available on <http://obama100days.amnesty.org>

Amnesty International's full list of calls to the US President-elect is available on: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/117/2008/en>

For more information -- including facts and figures, stories and interviews (including with former detainees and Amnesty International experts) – please see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/resources/counter-terror-with-justice>, or contact:

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