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UK: Basic rights denied after 11 September

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Serious human rights violations have occurred as a consequence of the UK authorities' response to the 11 September attacks in the USA, states Amnesty International's report "Rights denied: the UK's response to 11 September 2001" released today.

The report denounces the treatment and conditions of detention of those detained in the aftermath of the events of 11 September. Detainees have been subjected to "small-group isolation"; and continue to be held in 22-hour-a-day lock-up. They have not received adequate health care and their right to religious exercise was limited.

"The regime under which detainees are held can lead to a serious physical and mental deterioration of their health which, in turn, could undermine their capacity to prepare their defence," said Livio Zilli, Amnesty International's researcher on the UK.

Detainees were denied prompt access to a solicitor. Upon their arrest and detention at Belmarsh Prison all of them were refused permission to make telephone calls to solicitors, whether they had pre-existing solicitors or not.

The detainees' contact with relatives and the outside world has been severely impeded. Social visits with relatives are tape-recorded and have a prison officer present despite, in some instances, a glass screen separating the detainee from visitors. Detainees stated that they were strip-searched before and after every visit.

Initially, detainees were only allowed to communicate with family members in English or through an interpreter. On one occasion, a detainee complained that his visit could not proceed unless English only was spoken because his interpreter was not being admitted to the unit as she was refusing to remove her headscarf.

As of 17 July 2002, none of those detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (ATCSA) had been interviewed by the UK authorities.

"The government has effectively created a shadow justice system devoid of the crucial

components and safeguards present in the criminal justice system," said Livio Zilli. Amnesty International is today presenting a Memorandum to the UK Government urging it to address these deficiencies.

"The case of the Algerian Lotfi Raissi is a powerful illustration that in the search for 'suspected terrorists' innocent people can get caught up -- violating their rights and those of their relatives to liberty and livelihood," said Livio Zilli.

Lotfi Raissi was arrested and detained for five months in Belmarsh high security prison, after the US authorities sought his extradition on the basis of suspicions concerning his involvement in the 11 September attacks. The extradition proceedings were brought to an end seven months later after the presiding judge ruled that he had received no evidence to support the US claims.

"The US authorities' reasons for seeking Lotfi Raissi's extradition included the fact that his identity and profession fit a certain profile: an Algerian man and a Muslim, a pilot and a flight instructor in the USA," said Livio Zilli.

Amnesty International received confirmation from the UK authorities in May, that seven UK nationals were being detained in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The authorities also confirmed that the men had twice been "visited" by UK officials, including some from MI5 and that they had been interviewed in relation to issues relevant to the UK's national security.

The UK authorities have failed to make representations to protect the rights of their nationals being held in Guantánamo, where they are denied prisoner of war status. In particular, Amnesty International is concerned that detainees, including UK nationals, have been denied access to legal counsel during questioning by US and UK intelligence officers.

"The defence of human rights begins at home. The UK authorities' real commitment to human rights is now being put to the test," Livio Zilli concluded.

Background

Eleven people have been detained without charge or trial, for an unspecified and potentially unlimited period of time, following their certification by the Secretary of State as "suspected international terrorists" under the ATCSA. The certification is based on secret information, which has not been disclosed to the detainees and which cannot be effectively challenged by them or by lawyers of their choice. At least another 25 people have been reportedly arrested under the Terrorism Act 2000, some of whom have been released without charge. The UK authorities have also detained a number of individuals on extradition warrants received from other governments, including the French and the US authorities.

For more information on Amnesty International's concerns regarding the ATCSA please see:

UK: Detaining non-UK nationals indefinitely is discriminatory,

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/EUR450142002>

UK: Government in the dock for indefinite detention without charge or trial,

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/EUR450122002>

UK: Concern over anti-terrorist arrests, <http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/EUR450282001>

UK: Rushed legislation opens door to human rights violations,

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/EUR450272001>

UK: A shadow criminal justice system is unacceptable,

<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/EUR450202001>

To arrange an interview or obtain a copy of the report or the Memorandum to the UK Government, please contact Judit Arenas on +44 (0)20 7413 5810 or +44 (0)7778 472 188, or by e-mail (jarenas@amnesty.org).

Public Document

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