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Denmark: Review of US rendition flights over Greenland “toothless”

Denmark must conduct an independent, thorough and effective investigation into the use of its territory for US-led rendition flights, rather than just review previously available documents, Amnesty International said today.

Denmark's foreign minister announced last week that an independent review of rendition flights conducted by the CIA since 2001 will be carried out by the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). The investigation will be limited to flights involving Greenland and not all of Danish territory.

DIIS will only be allowed to review documents from a previous Danish inquiry held in 2008 and investigators will not be allowed to compel witness testimony or request any new information.

“Limiting this inquiry to Greenland only and a review of the files from a past investigation is just not good enough,” said Julia Hall, Amnesty International's expert on counter-terrorism and human rights.

“Brand new information on renditions in Europe has been disclosed since 2008 in places like Poland, Lithuania, and Finland. A new inquiry should do more than tick boxes. It should have the power to look at all of Danish territory and be given access to information not yet in the public domain,” she said

The DIIS investigation will investigate allegations in Wikileaks cables indicating collusion between the USA and Denmark to ensure that the 2008 Danish inquiry into rendition operations would not reveal the truth about Denmark's alleged complicity in the programme.

It will also conduct an independent review of the Danish inquiry report to ensure that the information and documentation from authorities in Denmark and Greenland accurately reflected the government's knowledge of and involvement in the rendition programme.

While in the opposition from 2006 until September 2011, the three parties now comprising Denmark's coalition government – Social Democratic Party, Socialist People's Party, Social Liberal Party -- consistently argued for an independent investigation into Denmark's role in the CIA rendition programme.

Reports by the Council of Europe, European Parliament, and nongovernmental organizations indicated that Greenland played a crucial role in rendition operations and other data suggest that rendition flights may have landed in Copenhagen and possibly other places in Denmark.

When the new government took office in October 2011, it refused to implement an independent, impartial, thorough and effective investigation into all the dimensions of Danish involvement in rendition operations.

The 2 November announcement of the DIIS investigation signaled a shift in position, but did not provide for a human-rights compliant process.

The Danish foreign minister, Villy Soevndal, has argued that a fuller investigation would be too expensive.

“It is disturbing to see the Danish government take half measures, when it has the ability and resources to order a full and effective investigation into every aspect of its alleged role in CIA operations,” said Julia Hall.

“The government has tied the investigators’ hands by refusing to give them the necessary powers to seek new information. By doing so, the authorities retain the power to keep information secret. If there is nothing to hide, this investigation must be given teeth so it can finally reveal the truth about Denmark’s role in the rendition programme. Without a full inquiry, the safeguards needed to guarantee that this won’t happen again cannot be implemented.”

“All the government needs is the political will to shift its position again and announce a real investigation into this issue. It has a legal obligation to do so and it must deliver the truth to its own citizens and to any victims of these practices who suffered terrible abuses,” she added.

Denmark assumes the EU presidency in January 2012. Amnesty International will continue to call on the Danish government to conduct a full and effective investigation into Denmark’s role in CIA counter-terrorism operations and also to call on other EU governments to do the same.