

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

AI Index; PRE 01/001/2010  
11 January 2010

**EMBARGO: Monday 11 January at 00:01hs GMT**

### **European states must take concrete steps to help close Guantánamo**

Leading human rights organizations today urged more European states to accept detainees held at the US detention centre at Guantánamo who cannot be returned to their countries of origin for fear of torture or other human rights violations.

On the eighth anniversary of the first transfers to Guantánamo, the organisations urged other countries, including Germany, Finland, Sweden and Luxembourg to do more to aid the transfer of roughly 50 such men who remain trapped after years of unlawful detention.

“Although several countries have already led the way, it is disappointing that only a few European governments have stepped forward to help those in need of protection,” said Sharon Critoph, Campaigner on the US at Amnesty International “Amongst those governments which have failed to assist are those previously most vocal in calling for Guantánamo to be closed.”

Reprieve, the Center for Constitutional Rights and former Guantánamo detainee Moazzam Begg of the organization Cage Prisoners are today beginning a tour across Europe urging more states to offer the men a safe haven. The tour will be hosted by Amnesty International’s national sections.

These men remain detained for the sole reason that they have no safe place to go. They have been essentially abandoned at Guantánamo. The plight of these men poses one of the most significant obstacles to the closure of the detention centre.

A number of European states have already taken the commendable step of offering a safe haven to such detainees, in line with the stated aims of the EU-US joint agreement on the closure of Guantánamo. These include France, Ireland, Portugal, Hungary and Belgium. On this important anniversary, human rights groups are urging others to follow suit.

The men come from countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Syria, China and Russia, where they will be at serious risk of torture or other human rights violations if returned.

The US government has been seeking safe countries willing to offer these men an opportunity to rebuild their lives and is primarily responsible for finding solutions for all those held at Guantánamo.

The international community which has repeatedly called for the detention centre’s closure can however help in realizing this aim by offering a safe haven to some of these men.

Guantánamo remains a stark symbol of injustice. Human rights groups have expressed concern that the detention facility will remain open past 22 January 2010, the date by which US President Barack Obama had pledged to close it. Unless more European countries step forward now to help, some of the most vulnerable detainees remain at serious risk of forcible return to abuse.

“The last decade saw the erosion of the rule of law and international respect for human rights. Guantánamo stands for all that went wrong and it must now be closed” said Sophie Weller of the Center for Constitutional Rights. “The men who remain detained because they lack a safe haven continue, every day to pay the human price for delay and inaction in achieving this aim.”

“Many European governments have condemned the ongoing detention of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. Now they can do something about it,” said Clive Stafford Smith, Director of Reprieve. “Actions really do speak louder than words in this case; its time to turn the rhetoric into reality and get Guantánamo closed as soon as possible.”

### **Background information**

The human rights organisations welcomed the actions of those countries which have already come forward to assist – such as France, Ireland, Portugal, Belgium, Hungary - but expressed disappointment that others had not taken concrete steps in line with the EU-US Joint Statement on the Closure of Guantánamo Bay. The statement, issued on 16 June 2009, expressed the readiness of certain EU Member States to assist with the reception of former detainees on a case-by-case basis.

Nearly seven months since this statement was issued, only seven former detainees have been welcomed into Europe as free men. A further ten have been sent to Palau and Bermuda, and two have been transferred to Italy for possible trial. Approximately 50 more still need protection.

The tour will include visits to a number of European countries - including Luxembourg, Sweden and Germany - which could provide safe and appropriate reception for detainees from Guantánamo, giving them the chance to rebuild their lives.

The organizations will also be calling on government officials in countries which have already accepted detainees to share expertise, encouragement and examples of good practice with their counterparts in countries which may be considering following suit.

There are 198 prisoners in total still held in Guantánamo.