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USA must investigate detainee abuse claims in Wikileaks files

Amnesty International today called on the USA to investigate how much US officials knew about the torture and other ill-treatment of detainees held by Iraqi security forces after new evidence emerged in files released by the Wikileaks organization on Friday.

“We have not yet had an opportunity to study the leaked files in detail but they add to our concern that the US authorities committed a serious breach of international law when they summarily handed over thousands of detainees to Iraqi security forces who, they knew, were continuing to torture and abuse detainees on a truly shocking scale,” said Malcolm Smart, Amnesty International’s director for the Middle East and North Africa.

The new disclosures appear to closely match the findings of *New Order, Same Abuses: Unlawful Detentions and Torture in Iraq*, a report published by Amnesty International in September 2010 detailing the widespread torture and other ill-treatment of detainees by Iraqi forces, committed with impunity. Thousands of Iraqis who had been detained by US forces were transferred from US to Iraqi custody between early 2009 and July 2010 under an agreement between the USA and Iraq that contains no provisions for ensuring protection of the detainees’ human rights.

“These documents apparently provide further evidence that the US authorities have been aware of this systematic abuse for years, yet they went ahead and handed over thousands of Iraqis they had detained to the Iraqi security forces,” said Malcolm Smart.

The USA is a party to the UN Convention against Torture, the main international treaty prohibiting torture, which requires all states to prohibit torture and to refrain from transferring detainees to the authorities of another state at whose hands they face torture.

Amnesty International continues to campaign for full accountability in the cases of all those detainees tortured and ill-treated by USA military personnel in Iraq, such as those in Abu Ghraib prison.

The US authorities, like all governments, have an obligation under international law not only to ensure that their own forces do not use torture, but also that people who were detained and are being held by US forces are not handed over to other authorities who are likely to torture them.

“The USA failed to respect this obligation in Iraq, despite the great volume of evidence, available from many different quarters, showing that the Iraqi security forces use torture widely and are allowed to do so with impunity.” said Malcolm Smart

“The information said to be in these documents also underscores the urgent need for the Iraqi government to take concrete measures to end torture, ensure the safety of all detainees, and root out and bring to justice those responsible for torture and other serious human rights abuses, however senior their position.”

Amnesty International video comment and video case study at <http://tiny.cc/AI-wikileaks>