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Afghanistan/USA: Prisoners must be treated humanely

"All those in US custody following the military operations in Afghanistan must be treated humanely, with full respect for international standards," Amnesty International said today.

"Reports that al-Qaeda and Taliban prisoners due to be transferred to a US base in Guantanamo, Cuba, may be drugged, hooded and shackled during the 20 hour transportation flight are worrying".

According to international standards restraints may be used when strictly necessary as a precaution against escape, damage or injury. However, if restraints are necessary, they must be applied humanely, with adequate opportunity for the prisoner to move limbs, use the bathroom and eat and drink.

Furthermore, sedating prisoners for other than medical purposes would be in breach of international standards. According to Principle 5 of the UN Principles of Medical Ethics any administration of sedative drugs should be in accordance with purely medical criteria.

In a letter to the authorities earlier this week Amnesty International expressed concern at photos showing detainees in Afghanistan hooded while under guard by US marines. Hooding suspects in detention may violate international standards prohibiting "cruel, inhuman or degrading" treatment. The standards emphasize that the term "cruel, inhuman or degrading" covers mental as well as physical abuse, including holding detainees in conditions that deprive them, even temporarily, of the use of any of their natural senses such as sight or

hearing or awareness of time or place. The hooding or blindfolding of suspects during interrogation also violates international standards.

"Housing detainees in Guantanamo in 6x8 feet chain-link "cages" at least partially open to the elements would also fall below minimum standards for humane treatment," the organization said. Standards for the treatment of detainees require adequate shelter from the elements. The cage size would be less than that considered acceptable under US standards for ordinary prisoners confined to cells.

The letter sent to US authorities is available on request from Amnesty International's press office or by visiting www.amnesty.org.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW web : <http://www.amnesty.org>