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USA: Executive order to close Guantánamo a major step forward

Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan today called President Barack Obama's executive order to close the Guantánamo detention facility "a major step forward" and a "welcome sign that the new administration is willing to right the wrongs of the past."

"This is clearly an important step in the right direction. Speed and specifics are now of the essence – the trial or release of these 240-plus detainee cases is already years overdue," said Irene Khan.

"By prioritizing the closure of Guantánamo in his first 48 hours in office, President Obama is sending an important message to the rest of the world that the USA is now closing a dark chapter in its history."

The executive order signed today states that the detention facility "shall be closed as soon as practicable, and no later than one year from the date of this order."

Amnesty International said that the reference to "as soon as practicable" should be interpreted and applied with urgency, noting that detainees who have not been charged should already have been released years ago.

"The USA dedicated substantial resources to this ill-judged exercise right from the start and throughout its seven-year operation. It should now dedicate the necessary resources and effort to bring it to a speedy and lawful closure," stated Irene Khan.

"The campaign run by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations over the past few years has borne fruit. We look to the Obama Administration to continue to give urgent action to right the many wrongs that were committed over the past seven years in the name of fighting terrorism."