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## Amnesty International Calls for Prosecutions of U.S. Officials Joshua Rubenstein interviewed by Scott Harris

*Between The Lines*

June 09, 2005

In a severe condemnation of U.S. conduct in its war against terrorism, Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan charged that the Bush administration had abdicated its responsibility to set a global example in upholding human rights. Speaking at a May 25th news conference in London unveiling the group's annual human rights report, Khan said, the American-run prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba "has become the gulag of our time."



Amnesty International is calling for the closing of the Guantanamo detention facility, which currently holds some 540 prisoners from 40 nations -- many detained without charge, and some held more than three years. Over the past year, investigations by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the FBI have documented cases of abuse

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:: 11 giugno - IRAQ: RSF, PER RILASCIO AUBENAS CHIESTO RISCATTO DI 15 MLN DI DOLLARI ■

:: 11 giugno - BALDONI:

and torture at the hands of U.S. personnel at Guantanamo and prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan.

William Schultz, executive director of Amnesty International USA, called on foreign governments to investigate and prosecute all senior U.S. officials who have violated the Geneva Conventions and the U.N. Convention Against Torture. Among those he named were President Bush, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez. Between The Lines' Scott Harris spoke with Joshua Rubenstein, northeast regional director of Amnesty International USA, who summarizes his group's condemnation of Bush administration policies that have condoned torture.

**JOSHUA RUBENSTEIN:** Amnesty issues what we call our annual report every spring. As in all these years there are reports on over a 140 countries. So, we highlight the ongoing crisis in Darfur where nearly 2 million refugees have been created - - many of them are staying in camps on both sides of the border with Chad. We talk about the ongoing crisis in Congo where more than 3 million casualties have taken place. We talk about Chechnya and Russia. So this is a report that covers the whole globe.

But of course, we have focused on the United States this year because of this scandal regarding torture. It was just a year ago that the world was alerted to the mistreatment and torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad, Iraq. And what we've learned since then has really reinforced our concerns.

It turns out that leading officials in the government, in the Pentagon, in the White House, in the Department of Justice were drafting memorandums not only justifying the use of torture, but coming up with contrived



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arguments in order to protect American personnel from being accused of using torture. So these are very contrived legal arguments, and we believe they genuinely reinforce the mistreatment and the torture that we're now finding out about in Afghanistan, in Guantanamo (Bay U.S. Naval base in Cuba) and in Iraq.

Plus we're now focusing on this policy of extraordinary rendition, where the United States takes prisoners either from the United States or different countries, say in Europe, and sends them to Syria or Egypt or Jordan for interrogation. Now why would they do that? We believe it's because they rely on those countries to interrogate these prisoners using torture and the U.S. wants to keep somewhat of a distance to keep its hands clean, while it has surrogates carry this kind of interrogation. In a sense, we call it "outsourcing torture." So this is what is focused on in the report.

**BETWEEN THE LINES:** Could you be specific about the kinds of torture that you believe are linked directly to official U.S. policy rather than the actions of rogue or sadistic guards or interrogators? Because the idea that lower-level soldiers are responsible for this abuse, is really the essence of how the White House has responded to this scandal.

**JOSHUA RUBENSTEIN:** Well, we feel there has been a real whitewash by blaming all of these lower down personnel and trying to keep the investigations away from people in the command structure.

Approximately 125 members of the U.S armed forces have either been court-martialed or received nonjudicial punishment or other administrative action. But to date, no one in the extended chain of command, including those who formulated policies on the treatment and interrogation of

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prisoners has been held accountable.

:: 10 giugno - Iraq: ancora esecuzioni sommarie, ritrovati 22 cadaveri

So, for example, we now know that CIA operatives were abusing prisoners with "water boarding." That's where you strap a person to a board and you immerse them in water and they fear they may be drowned because their head is below water for a certain amount of time and you threaten them with drowning. This is a common form of torture in Latin America for example -- and here we believe that U.S. CIA agents have been using this form of torture.

:: 10 giugno - IRAQ: SUNNITI RESPINGONO OFFERTA DI COMPROMESSO SU COSTITUZIONE

There's a certain term called "stress position." Now, on the surface of things this may seem like a superficial or not so intrusive kind of torture where you tie someone to a chair where they're not seated properly; it's awkward for them. But when you keep someone there indefinitely for many, many hours or days at a time, this becomes extremely painful. Or sleep deprivation that may not leave physical scars, but when you do not permit someone to sleep for several days at a time, this becomes very disorienting and painful. It can have a severe impact on one's health. This is simply a form of torture. We knew about it during Stalin's time, why should it be OK for representatives of the United States to use these techniques?

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Mr. Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, suggested threatening people with dogs and we have photographs from Abu Ghraib where officers are seen are holding these large, menacing German Shepherds in front of prisoners.

:: 10 giugno - Bush: popolarita' a minimi storici

So we believe there's a direct connection between the techniques that American officials in Washington were proposing and the treatment that we know occurred in Bagram (U.S. Air base, Afghanistan) in Abu Ghraib and at Guantanamo.

:: 10 giugno - Iraq: trovati 16 corpi di uomini giustiziati

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**BETWEEN THE LINES:** Tell us about Amnesty's call for other governments to investigate and possibly prosecute high-level officials in the Bush administration such as Attorney General Gonzalez, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and others at the Pentagon.

**JOSHUA RUBENSTEIN:** The call for an international response to this torture scandal is based on the fact that there has not been an adequate investigation here in the United States. If there were an adequate investigation, there would be no need for European governments to have investigations of their own.

Torture can be prosecuted around the world; there's universal jurisdiction. That's why General Pinochet (former Chilean dictator) was indicted by a Spanish judge. That's why courts in Belgium considered indicting government leaders from other parts of the world. And the fact is, there's no statute of limitations on torture. The U.S. is party to a convention that grants over 120 countries the power to investigate torture by government leaders in any country of the world.

And so right now, it may obviously seem unlikely that, say a European government would indict President Bush or Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld or someone else. But when this group leaves office, when they are private citizens, when they travel, it's quite possible that a prosecutor in Germany or Spain or another country would seek an indictment, and that would be perfectly legitimate as long as it was based on serious and genuine investigation and hard evidence.

Contact Amnesty International USA by calling (212) 807-8400 or visit their Web site at <http://www.amnestyusa.org>

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- Iraq:  
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- Iraq:  
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