



U.S. prepares to face U.N. on torture as Amnesty report blasts 'war crimes'

RAW STORY
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As the United States prepares a team of 30 to defend its record on torture before a U.N. committee, Amnesty International has made public a report blasting the United States for failing to take appropriate steps to eradicate use of torture at U.S. detention sites around the world, **RAW STORY** has learned.

U.S. compliance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment will be the topic of May 5 and 8 U.N. hearings in Geneva.

The United States last appeared before the Committee Against Torture in May, 2000. Amnesty claims that practices criticized by the Committee six years ago -- such as the use of electro-shock weapons and excessively harsh conditions in "super-maximum" security prisons -- have been used and exported by U.S. forces abroad.

The Amnesty report reviews several cases where U.S. detainees held in Afghanistan and Iraq have died as a result of torture. The group also lambasts U.S. use of electro-shock weapons, inhuman and degrading conditions of isolation in "super-max" security prisons and abuses against women in the prison system -- including sexual abuse by male guards, shackling while pregnant and even in labor.

As of now, the U.S. has yet to prosecute a single official, military officer or private contractor for "torture" or "war crimes" related to its occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, or the "war on terror."

"The heaviest sentence imposed on anyone to date for a torture-related death while in U.S. custody is five months," notes Curt Goering, Senior Deputy Executive Director for Amnesty International USA. "[That's] the same sentence that you might receive in the U.S. for stealing a bicycle."

The five month sentence resulted from the death of a 22-year-old taxi-driver, who had been hooded and chained to a ceiling, then kicked and beaten until dead.

"The U.S. government is not only failing to take steps to eradicate torture," he adds, "it is actually creating a climate in which torture and other ill-treatment can flourish -- including by trying to narrow the definition of torture."

The report argues that these cases are not isolated incidents, but part of an overall pattern condoned by U.S. officials.

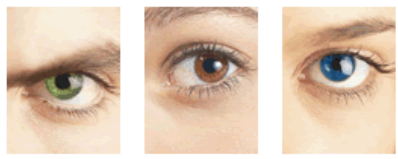
"While the government continues to try to claim that the abuse of detainees in U.S. custody was mainly due to a few 'aberrant' soldiers, there is clear evidence to the contrary," said Javier Zuniga, Amnesty International's Americas Program Director. "Most of the torture and ill-treatment stemmed directly from officially sanctioned procedures and policies -- including interrogation techniques approved by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld."

Amnesty's findings have already been sent to members of the UN Committee Against Torture.

At its May 1-19 session, the Committee Against Torture will consider reports presented by Georgia, Guatemala, Republic of Korea, Qatar, Peru, Togo and the United States. With the exceptions of Korea and Peru, Amnesty has also provided reports about the actions of these nations.

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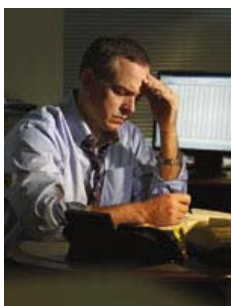
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