

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Lithuania: Investigation of allegations of CIA secret prison must be effective and impartial

Amnesty International welcomes the announcement by Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė on 25 August that her government will investigate allegations that Lithuania housed a secret prison where CIA operatives interrogated terrorism suspects in the years following the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001. Amnesty International urges the Lithuanian authorities to ensure that the investigation is full, effective, and impartial.

In a story released on 20 August, US-based television outlet *ABC News* quoted unnamed CIA sources as saying that Lithuania provided a detention facility outside the capital, Vilnius, where “high value” detainees were held and questioned in secret by the CIA until late 2005. According to these sources, up to eight terrorism suspects were housed at the detention site during its operation. These revelations prompted President Grybauskaitė to call for the establishment of a special parliamentary commission to address the allegations.

Lithuania is the latest European country alleged to have colluded with the US government to secretly imprison and question terrorism suspects, subjecting such detainees to enforced disappearance and many suspects to interrogation techniques amounting to torture and other ill-treatment in violation of US, European, and international law. Poland and Romania have also been named by investigative committees of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, as well as by non-governmental organizations and the media, as hosts for secret CIA prisons. Investigations by those countries have been riddled with problems, including the refusal of key governmental agencies to cooperate in full with the inquiry process.

Amnesty International urges the Lithuanian authorities to avoid the mistakes of other European governments and to conduct a full, effective, independent and impartial investigation into the alleged role of Lithuanian officials and the use of state territory in connection with secret detention and enforced disappearance, and the possible involvement of Lithuanian state agents in other serious human rights abuses, including torture. The investigation should be conducted with as much transparency as possible, with its scope, methodology, and findings made public. Hearings should be held in public and any claims that evidence should not be disclosed must be determined by an authority independent of the Lithuanian executive.

The absence of transparency in investigations in other countries has created a roadblock to full accountability for European involvement in these abusive practices. The Polish national prosecutor commenced an investigation in September 2008 into Poland’s role in providing the CIA with a secret prison site at Stare Kiejkuty military base, near Szymany airport in northeast Poland. But the Polish government has failed to cooperate in full with the investigation, claiming that “state secrets” prohibit it from disclosing key evidence because such disclosure could threaten national security. A commission of inquiry established by the Romanian government in 2006 concluded that no secret prison operated on Romanian soil, despite sharp criticism from Amnesty International and others regarding the extremely poor quality of the investigation, the absence of

transparency with respect to its scope and methods, and the lack of cooperation from the Romanian authorities in the process.

The Council of Europe and the European Parliament have issued detailed reports on European states' involvement in the CIA's rendition and secret detention programmes and called on member states to fully investigate allegations of complicity in these grave human rights abuses. In a statement released on 21 August 2009, Swiss Senator Dick Marty, special rapporteur on secret detentions for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee, stated that his own confidential sources appeared to confirm the report of a secret prison in Lithuania. Senator Marty called on European governments "to come clean" by accounting for their involvement in this "shameful episode" and to avoid the unjustified use of the "state secrets" doctrine to obstruct the full disclosure of relevant information.

US Attorney General Eric Holder's announcement on 24 August 2009 that the US Department of Justice would initiate a preliminary review into some interrogations of detainees in the secret detention programme helps set the stage for greater accountability on both sides of the Atlantic. An independent and impartial investigation by the Lithuanian government into allegations of a secret prison on its territory could set an example for the rest of Europe and lead to just such accountability.

For further information about Amnesty International's work on renditions and secret detentions in the global fight against terrorism, see:

"State of Denial: Europe's role in rendition and secret detention" (AI Index: EUR 01/003/2008)

UK/US: Revelations about detention flights in Diego Garcia highlight need for full inquiry, Press Release, 28 February 2008

Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers: Still no Action on Renditions and Secret Detention: if not now, when? (AI Index: IOR 61/002/2008)

Renditions in the EU: Fact – not fiction (AI Index: EUR 01/002/2007)

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org