

AI Index: PRE 01/033/2013
21 January 2013

USA: Disclose reported guidelines on drones and so-called ‘targeted killings’

The use of lethal force by the US government must be in accordance with international law, Amnesty International said amid reports the USA is finalising a “manual” for targeted killings including drone strikes.

US media over the weekend reported that the administration of Barack Obama is finalising guidelines setting out its counterterrorism policies.

“There already exists a rulebook for these issues – it is called international law. Any policy on so-called ‘targeted killings’ by the US government should not only be fully disclosed, but must comply with international law,” said Susan Lee, Americas Programme Director at Amnesty International.

To date, the justifications publicly offered by senior Obama administration officials have shown only that US government policy appears to permit extrajudicial executions in violation of international law.

“Any policy guidelines should reject the US government's previous reliance on a ‘global war’ legal theory that treats the entire world as a battlefield between the USA and armed groups, on which intentional lethal force may apparently be used without regard to human rights standards.”

The “manual” under development would reportedly exclude the CIA’s operations in Pakistan, where reportedly more than 300 drone strikes have killed civilians as well as suspected militants.

“These reports further highlight the layers of secrecy and lack of independent oversight surrounding the CIA’s operations in Pakistan and other parts of the world. With President Obama beginning his second term in office, now is the time to publicly disclose all relevant legal and factual information relating to US policy and practices for so-called ‘targeted killings’ and drone strikes and send a clear signal that US counter-terrorism operations are not a license to act above the rule of law,” Susan Lee said.