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USA: Senate findings reinforce need for full commission of inquiry

"The US Senate inquiry acknowledges what has long been apparent – that the abuse of detainees in the 'war on terror' was not just due to a 'few bad apples' but that policies endorsed by senior US officials were a major cause of such abuse," said Amnesty International today in reaction to the executive summary of the Senate Armed Services Committee's investigation.

Among other things, the Committee concluded that President George W. Bush's decision to deny detainees the protections of the Geneva Conventions and to make humane treatment a matter of policy rather than law contributed to abuse. The Committee also found that former Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld's authorization of "aggressive" techniques for use in Guantánamo in late 2002 – including stripping, hooding, sensory deprivation and the use of dogs – influenced interrogation policies in Afghanistan and later Iraq.

The Committee has only released the executive summary and conclusions of its report. The rest remains classified.

"The conclusions of this investigation show the need for a comprehensive commission of inquiry into "war on terror" abuses, as well as the prosecution of anybody against whom there is evidence of criminal wrongdoing under national or international law, regardless of the person's rank or position," said Susan Lee, Director of the Americas Programme at Amnesty International.

"There must be full accountability for the devastating consequences of the authorisation of torture and other unlawful practices as part of the 'war on terror'."

The establishment and operation of a commission of inquiry must not be used to block or delay the prosecution of any individuals against whom there is already sufficient evidence of wrongdoing.

The USA is required by international law to respect and ensure human rights, to thoroughly investigate every violation of those rights, and to bring perpetrators to justice, no matter their level of office or former level of office. Victims of human rights violations have the right under international law to effective access to remedy and reparation. In addition, there is a collective and individual right to the truth about violations.

For more information, please see:

USA: Investigation, prosecution, remedy: Accountability for human rights violations in the 'war on terror'
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/151/2008/en>

USA: Human dignity denied. Torture and accountability in the 'war on terror', October 2004,
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/145/2004>.

USA: From ill-treatment to unfair trial. The case of Mohammed Jawad, child 'enemy combatant', August 2008 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/091/2008/en>
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