

# Human Rights Watch

## Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2005/04/27/us-abu-ghraib-only-tip-iceberg>

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(New York) - The crimes at Abu Ghraib are part of a larger pattern of abuses against Muslim detainees around the world, Human Rights Watch said on the eve of the April 28 anniversary of the first pictures of U.S. soldiers brutalizing prisoners at the Iraqi jail.

Human Rights Watch released a summary ([below](#)) of evidence of U.S. abuse of detainees in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as well as of the programs of secret CIA detention, extraordinary renditions, and reverse renditions.

Abu Ghraib was only the tip of the iceberg, said Reed Brody, special counsel for Human Rights Watch. Its now clear that abuse of detainees has happened all over from Afghanistan to Guantanamo Bay to a lot of third-country dungeons where the United States has sent prisoners. And probably quite a few other places we don't even know about.

Human Rights Watch called this week for the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate the culpability of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and ex-CIA Director George Tenet, as well as Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, formerly the top U.S. commander in Iraq, and Gen. Geoffrey Miller, the former commander of the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba in cases of crimes against detainees. It rejected last week's report by the Army Inspector General which was said to absolve Gen. Sanchez of responsibility.

General Sanchez gave the troops at Abu Ghraib the green light to use dogs to terrorize detainees, and they did, and we know what happened, said Brody. And while mayhem went on under his nose for three months, Sanchez didn't step in to halt it.

Human Rights Watch also expressed concern that, despite all the damage that had been done by the detainee abuse scandal, the United States had not stopped the use of illegal coercive interrogation. In January 2005, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales claimed in a written response during his confirmation hearings that the prohibition on cruel, inhuman, or degrading (CID) treatment does not apply to U.S. personnel in the treatment of non-citizens abroad, indicating that no law would prohibit the CIA from engaging in CID treatment when it interrogates non-Americans outside the United States.

Human Rights Watch said that the U.S. government was still withholding key information about the treatment of detainees, including directives reportedly signed by President George W. Bush authorizing the CIA to establish secret detention facilities and to render suspects to countries where torture is used.

If the United States is to wipe away the stain of Abu Ghraib, it needs to investigate those at the top who ordered or condoned abuse and come clean on what the president has authorized, said Brody. Washington must repudiate, once and for all, the mistreatment of detainees in the name of the war on terror.

### U.S. Abuse of Detainees around the World

#### Afghanistan:

Nine detainees are now known to have died in U.S. custody in Afghanistan including four cases already determined by Army investigators to be murder or manslaughter. Former detainees have made scores of other claims of torture and other mistreatment. In a March 2004 report, Human Rights Watch documented cases of U.S. personnel arbitrarily detaining Afghan civilians, using excessive force during arrests of non-combatants, and mistreating detainees. Detainees held at military bases in 2002 and 2003 described to Human Rights Watch being beaten severely by both guards and interrogators, deprived of sleep for extended periods, and intentionally exposed to extreme cold, as well as other inhumane and degrading treatment. In December 2004, Human Rights Watch raised additional concerns about detainee deaths, including one alleged to have occurred as late as September 2004. In March 2005, The Washington Post uncovered another death in CIA custody, noting that the case was under investigation but that the CIA officer implicated had been promoted.

## **Guantanamo Bay, Cuba:**

There is growing evidence that detainees at Guantanamo have suffered torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Reports by FBI agents who witnessed detainee abuse including chained detainees forced to sit in their own excrement have recently emerged, adding to the statements of former detainees describing the use of painful stress positions, use of military dogs to threaten detainees, threats of torture and death, and prolonged exposure to extremes of heat, cold and noise. Ex-detainees also said they had been subjected to weeks and even months in solitary confinement at times either suffocatingly hot or cold from excessive air conditioning as punishment for failure to cooperate. Videotapes of riot squads subduing suspects reportedly show the guards punching some detainees, tying one to a gurney for questioning and forcing a dozen to strip from the waist down. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has told the U.S. government in confidential reports that its treatment of detainees has involved psychological and physical coercion that is tantamount to torture.

## **Iraq:**

Harsh and coercive interrogation techniques such as subjecting detainees to painful stress positions and extended sleep deprivation have been routinely used in detention centers throughout Iraq. The Schlesinger panel appointed by Secretary Rumsfeld noted 55 substantiated cases of detainee abuse in Iraq, plus 20 instances of detainee deaths still under investigation. The earlier report of Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba found numerous incidents of sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses constituting systematic and illegal abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib. Another Pentagon report documented 44 allegations of such war crimes at Abu Ghraib. An ICRC report concluded that in military intelligence sections of Abu Ghraib, methods of physical and psychological coercion used by the interrogators appeared to be part of the standard operating procedures by military intelligence personnel to obtain confessions and extract information.

## **CIA Disappearances and Torture:**

At least 11 al-Qaeda suspects, and most likely many more, have disappeared in U.S. custody. The Central Intelligence Agency is holding the detainees in undisclosed locations, with no notification to their families, no access to the International Committee of the Red Cross or oversight of any sort of their treatment, and in some cases, no acknowledgement that they are even being held, effectively placing them beyond the protection of the law. One detainee, Khalid Shaikh Muhammed, was reportedly subjected to water boarding in which a person is strapped down, forcibly pushed under water, and made to believe he might drown. It was also reported that U.S. officials initially withheld painkillers from Abu Zubayda, who was shot during his capture, as an interrogation device.

## **Extraordinary Renditions:**

The CIA has transferred some 100 to 150 detainees to countries in the Middle East known to practice torture routinely. In one case, Maher Arar, a Canadian in transit in New York, was detained by U.S. authorities and sent to Syria. He was released without charge from Syrian custody ten months later and has described repeated torture, often with cables and electrical cords. In another case, a U.S. government-leased airplane transported two Egyptian suspects who were blindfolded, hooded, drugged, and diapered by hooded operatives, from Sweden to Egypt. There the two men were held incommunicado for five weeks and have given detailed accounts of torture, including electric shocks. In a third case, Mamdouh Habib, an Australian in American custody, was transported from Pakistan to Afghanistan to Egypt to Guantanamo Bay. Now back home in Australia, Habib alleges that he was tortured in Egypt with beatings and electric shocks, and hung from the walls by hooks.

## **Reverse Renditions:**

Detainees arrested by foreign authorities in non-combat and non-battlefield situations have been transferred to the United States without basic protections afforded to criminal suspects. `Abd al-Salam `Ali al-Hila, a Yemeni businessman captured in Egypt, for instance, was handed over to U.S. authorities and disappeared for more than a year and a half before being sent to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. Six Algerians held in Bosnia were transferred to U.S. officials in January 2002 (despite a Bosnian high court order to release them) and were sent to Guantanamo.

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