

## **Fighting Terrorism Fairly**

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### **Body**

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After some hesitation, the federal government seems to be moving to end abusive practices in its handling of immigrants suspected of **terrorism**. The reforms, prompted by a blistering report from the Justice Department's inspector general, are a welcome improvement.

But they will need the support of Attorney General John Ashcroft, who has shown little remorse about his department's mishandling of immigrants.

The inspector general's report found "significant problems" in the post-Sept. 11 roundup of suspected terrorists. Many detainees were classified as **terrorism** suspects on scant evidence. There was a "pattern of physical and verbal abuse." And detainees were denied access to lawyers. Responding to the report, the Justice Department said it made "no apologies" for how it went about protecting the American public. While asking Congress for new **terrorism-fighting** powers, Mr. Ashcroft used similar language.

By adopting the new policies, the government is at least implicitly admitting that mistakes were made. The new guidelines, based on 12 recommendations in the inspector general's report, include clearer standards for deciding when a detained immigrant should be considered a **terrorism** suspect, and improvements in conditions of confinement.

If these reforms are going to work, they cannot be mere words in a rule book. Mr. Ashcroft should embrace them publicly, and explain to law enforcement why they are necessary. It does not detract from the war on **terrorism** for the government to admit when it has gone too far.

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