

Today, Amnesty International released a recommended timeline for investigating the U.S. government's violations of domestic and international law in its counterterrorism actions. The human rights organization urges that there must be a thorough investigation of the abuses committed in the war on terror through an independent commission. Amnesty International's recommendations provide a timeline and conditions necessary to best attain truth and accountability.

"Closing Guantanamo, as President-elect Obama has pledged, is just the first step. For real change, the incoming administration and Congress must work together to fully expose the Bush administration policies as a step toward ensuring that the same abuses committed in the name of national security are not repeated," said Larry Cox, executive director of Amnesty International USA. "Ending these shameful practices is not enough. To demonstrate that the United States is genuinely committed to human rights and to the rule of law, the new administration and Congress must end the secrecy that has obscured human rights abuses from public scrutiny and shielded those responsible from accountability. It is beyond time to finally shut down Guantanamo Bay and push the door open to truth."

The four-phase timeline, developed under the auspices of an ongoing collaboration facilitated by the International Center for Transitional Justice, sets out recommendations for the transition period, immediately upon taking office, the first 100 days and the first eighteen months.

In the transition period and before taking the oath of office, Amnesty International urges President-elect Barack Obama and his team to examine the options for establishing a comprehensive, independent commission to investigate U.S. detention policies and practices in the war on terror. Such a commission can be established by executive order, congressional resolution or enacting legislation. In addition, the transition team should consider either establishing a task force in the Attorney General's office or appointing an independent prosecutor to take action on pressing individual cases.

In his first days in office, the new president should issue an executive order to safeguard all documentary evidence and commit to promoting a serious and thorough investigation, the organization recommends. By the first 100 days, there should be a developed proposal and movement toward the creation of a commission to investigate the detention policies and practices that were put in place after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

A commission, whether it is presidentially or congressionally created, must be independent, impartial, and resourced to carry out a comprehensive investigation into all war on terror-related detention policies, practices and facilities. It needs to include activities conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency and other agencies, as well as the secret transfer of detainees between the United States and other countries. In addition, the commission should be empowered to access classified material, to compel the appearance of witnesses and to make recommendations as to criminal investigations.

Within the first 18 months, Amnesty International calls on the president to provide the nation a progress report of the new administration's efforts in his 2010 State of Union address, and by July 2010 to provide a full report of the commission and its recommendations to the government and be made available to the public.

Amnesty International is mobilizing its worldwide members and supporters to call on the new administration and Congress to make a renewed commitment to human rights including closing Guantanamo, issuing an executive order banning torture and establishing an independent commission to investigate abuses in the war on terror.

"As the nation moves in a new direction, we must not forget the shameful actions of the past. Instead to fully learn from them we must know the extent of the illegality and vow to never repeat mistakes. President-elect Obama has a mandate from the American people for change and that begins with restoring the United States' reputation as a country guided by the rule of law and human rights," said Cox.