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VERMONTCOMMITTEES:  
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND  
FORESTRY  
APPROPRIATIONS  
JUDICIARY**United States Senate**

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

June 2, 2004

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice  
National Security Adviser  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Dr. Rice:

Over the past several months, unnamed Administration officials have suggested in several press accounts that detainees held by the United States in the war on terrorism have been subjected to "stress and duress" interrogation techniques, including beatings, lengthy sleep and food deprivation, and being shackled in painful positions for extended periods of time. Our understanding is that these statements pertain in particular to interrogations conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency in Afghanistan and other locations outside the United States. Officials have also stated that detainees have been transferred for interrogation to governments that routinely torture prisoners.

These assertions have been reported extensively in the international media in ways that could undermine the credibility of American efforts to combat torture and promote the rule of law, particularly in the Islamic world.

I appreciate President Bush's statement, during his recent meeting with U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Sergio De Mello, that the United States does not, as a matter of policy, practice torture. I also commend the Administration for its willingness to meet with and respond to the concerns of leading human rights organizations about reports of mistreatment of detainees. At the same time, I believe the Administration's response thus far, including in a recent letter to Human Rights Watch from Department of Defense General Counsel William Haynes, while helpful, leaves important questions unanswered.

The Administration understandably does not wish to catalogue the interrogation techniques used by U.S. personnel in fighting international terrorism. But it should affirm with clarity that America upholds in practice the laws that prohibit the specific forms of mistreatment reported in recent months. The need for a clear and thorough response from the Administration is all the greater because reports of mistreatment initially arose not from outside complaints, but from statements made by administration officials themselves.

With that in mind, I would appreciate your answers to the following questions:

First, Mr. Haynes' letter states that when questioning enemy combatants, U.S. personnel are required to follow "applicable laws prohibiting torture." What are those laws? Given that the United States has ratified the Convention Against Torture and Other Forms of Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), is this Convention one of those laws, and does it bind U.S. personnel both inside and outside the United States?

Second, does the Administration accept that the United States has a specific obligation under the CAT not to engage in cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment?

Third, when the United States ratified the CAT, it entered a reservation regarding its prohibition on cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, stating that it interprets this term to mean "the cruel, unusual and inhumane treatment or punishment prohibited by the 5th, 8th, and/or 14th amendments to the Constitution." Are all U.S. interrogations of enemy combatants conducted in a manner consistent with this reservation?

Fourth, in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, the State Department has repeatedly condemned many of the same "stress and duress" interrogation techniques that U.S. personnel are alleged to have used in Afghanistan. Can you confirm that the United States is not employing the specific methods of interrogation that the State Department has condemned in countries such as Egypt, Iran, Eritrea, Libya, Jordan and Burma?

Fifth, the Defense Department acknowledged in March that it was investigating the deaths from blunt force injury of two detainees who were held at Bagram air base in Afghanistan. What is the status of that investigation and when do you expect it to be completed? Has the Defense Department or the CIA investigated any other allegations of torture or mistreatment of detainees, and if so, with what result? What steps would be taken if any U.S. personnel were found to have engaged in unlawful conduct?


Finally, Mr. Haynes' letter offers a welcome clarification that when detainees are transferred to other countries, "U.S. government instructions are to seek and obtain appropriate assurances that such enemy combatants are not tortured." How does the Administration follow up to determine if these pledges of humane treatment are honored in practice, particularly when the governments in question are known to practice torture?

I believe these questions can be answered without revealing sensitive information or in any way undermining the fight against international terrorism. Defeating terrorism is a national security priority, and no one questions the imperative of subjecting captured terrorists to thorough and aggressive interrogations consistent with the law.

The challenge is to carry on this fight while upholding the values and laws that distinguish us from the enemy we are fighting. As President Bush has said, America is not merely struggling to defeat a terrible evil, but to uphold "the permanent rights and the hopes of mankind." I hope you agree that clarity on this fundamental question of human rights and human dignity is vital to that larger struggle.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

  
PATRICK LEAHY  
United States Senator

Condi - I want to make  
sure we are on the  
right moral plain if an  
American is being held  
abroad.

Pat