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Amnesty International calls on the European Council to ban renditions

Open letter to Heads of State or Government of the European Union

Tomorrow, 14 June 2006, Amnesty International will publish a new report on the abuse of human rights in the context of counter-terrorism, "*Partners in Crime: Europe's role in US renditions*". The report details the involvement of seven European countries including four EU Member States in the US-led renditions programme.

Amnesty International arrives to the same conclusion as last week's report of the inquiry by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: there is irrefutable evidence of European complicity in the unlawful practice of rendition by which individuals have been illegally detained and secretly flown to third countries where they have been subjected to torture and "disappearance".

Not only are individual European States to be held legally responsible for rendition abuses, such serious violations of human rights by Member States are also the proper concern of the EU as a whole. The persistent denial by governments of their countries' involvement in renditions and the lack of any meaningful response from the Council pose a serious problem for the credibility of the EU, and ultimately also for the effectiveness of the counter-terrorist effort itself. The European Council must therefore put a resolute stop to the attitude of "see no evil, hear no evil" that has prevailed so far.

Next week the EU will meet with President Bush at the EU-US Summit in Vienna, which should be the appropriate occasion to relay the recent declarations of EU Foreign Affairs Ministers, the Austrian Presidency and the Commission, calling for the closure of Guantánamo. However, if the EU is to address a credible message to the USA, it must leave no doubt that it will not tolerate itself any national or EU law or practice in the fight against terrorism that violates the principles of respect for the rule of law and the protection of human rights.

Amnesty International calls on the European Council to declare unequivocally:

1. that renditions are unacceptable, as is the use of "diplomatic assurances" in cases where persons would be at risk of torture or other grave abuses;
2. that it commits the EU and its Member States to full cooperation with ongoing inquiries;
3. that victims of rendition shall be awarded the fullest possible redress
4. that it will act to regulate against the use of Member States' airspace or airports for rendition purposes and to ensure full accountability for the operations of foreign and national intelligence services.