

Alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers of detainees involving Council of Europe member states - draft Recommendation and Resolution

 assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/FeaturesManager-View-EN.asp

Provisional version

7 June 2006

Alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers of detainees involving Council of Europe member states

Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

Rapporteur: Mr Dick Marty, Switzerland, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

A. Draft resolution

1. The Council of Europe is both the point of reference and the guardian for human rights, democracy and respect for the rule of law in Europe. It draws its legal and moral authority from, *inter alia*, the common standards of human rights protection embodied in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the European Convention on the Prevention of Torture (ECPT), to which all of its 46 member States subscribe.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe places human rights at the heart of its work. The Assembly must raise the alarm internationally whenever human rights are set aside, or when established standards of their application are undermined.
3. The Assembly reaffirms its absolute commitment to overcoming the threat of terrorism; but it must equally speak out in the strongest possible terms against the numerous and systematic human rights abuses committed in the pursuit of the so-called "war on terrorism". It considers that such violations play into the hands of the terrorists and ultimately serve to strengthen those who aim to destroy the established political, legal and social order.
4. The United States of America finds that neither the classic instruments of criminal law and procedure, nor the framework of the laws of war (including respect for the Geneva Conventions) has been apt to address the terrorist threat. As a result it has introduced new legal concepts, such as "enemy combatant" and "rendition", which were previously unheard of in international law and stand contrary to the basic legal principles that prevail on our continent.
5. Thus, across the world, the United States has progressively woven a clandestine "spider's web" of disappearances, secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers, often encompassing countries notorious for their use of torture. Hundreds of persons have become entrapped in this web, in some cases merely suspected of sympathising with a presumed terrorist organisation.
6. The "spider's web" has been spun out with the collaboration or tolerance of many countries, including several Council of Europe member States. This co-operation, which took place in secret and without any democratic legitimacy, has spawned a system that is utterly incompatible with the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe.
7. The facts and information gathered to date, along with new factual patterns in the process of being uncovered, indicate that the key elements of this "spider's web" have included a world-wide network of secret detentions on CIA "black sites" and in military or naval installations; the CIA's programme of "renditions", under which terrorist suspects are flown between States on civilian aircraft, outside of the scope of any legal protections, often to be

handed over to States who customarily resort to degrading treatment and torture; and the use of military airbases and aircraft to transport detainees as human cargo to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba or to other detention centres.

8. The Assembly condemns the systematic exclusion of all forms of judicial protection and regrets that, by depriving hundreds of suspects of their basic rights, including the right to a fair trial, the United States has done a disservice to the cause of justice and has tarnished its own hard-won reputation as a beacon of the defence of civil liberties and human rights.

9. Some Council of Europe member States have knowingly colluded with the United States to carry out these unlawful operations; some others have tolerated them or simply turned a blind eye. They have also gone to great lengths to ensure that such operations remain secret and protected from effective national or international scrutiny.

10. This collusion with the United States of America by some Council of Europe member States has taken several different forms. Having carried out legal and factual analysis on a range of cases of alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers, the Assembly has identified instances in which Council of Europe member States have acted in one or several of the following ways, wilfully or at least recklessly in violation of their international human rights obligations:

10.1. secretly detaining a person on European territory for an indefinite period of time, whilst denying that person's basic human rights and failing to ensure procedural legal guarantees such as *habeas corpus*;

10.2. capturing a person and handing the person over to the United States, in the knowledge that such a person would be unlawfully transferred into a US-administered detention facility;

10.3. permitting the unlawful transportation of detainees on civilian aircraft carrying out "renditions" operations, travelling through European airspace or across European territory;

10.4. passing on information or intelligence to the United States where it was foreseeable that such material would be relied upon directly to carry out a "rendition" operation or to hold a person in secret detention;

10.5. participating directly in interrogations of persons subjected to "rendition", or held in secret detention;

10.6. accepting or making use of information gathered in the course of detainee interrogations, before, during or after which the detainee in question was threatened or subjected to torture or other forms of human rights abuse;

10.7. making available civilian airports or military airfields as "staging points" or platforms for rendition or other unlawful detainee transfer operations, whereby an aircraft prepares for and takes off on its operation from such a point; and

10.8. making available civilian airports or military airfields as "stopover points" for rendition operations, whereby an aircraft lands briefly at such a point on the outward or homeward flight, for example to refuel.

11. Attempts to expose the true nature and extent of these unlawful operations have invariably faced obstruction or dismissal, from the United States and its European partners alike. The authorities of most Council of Europe member States have denied their participation, in many cases without actually having carried out any inquiries or serious investigations.

12. In other instances such attempts have been thwarted on the grounds of national security or state secrecy. The Assembly takes the view that neither national security nor state secrecy can be invoked in such a sweeping, systematic fashion as to shield these unlawful operations from robust parliamentary and judicial scrutiny.

13. The Assembly highlights the widespread breach of the positive obligations of all Council of Europe member States to investigate such allegations in a full and thorough manner. It has now been demonstrated incontestably, by numerous well-documented and convergent facts, that secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers involving European countries have taken place, such as to require in-depth inquiries and urgent

responses by the executive and legislative branches of all the countries concerned.

14. While the Assembly has been seized in this instance with looking into allegations concerning very specific facts, it cannot ignore other allegations surrounding the existence of other secret detention centres in Europe, apparently also set up in the context of the "war on terrorism". In particular, the Assembly expresses its deep concern at the continued reports of secret detentions in the North Caucasus. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture issued a Public Statement on this subject in 2003, which was recently supplemented by new, detailed victim testimony and credible allegations from non-governmental organisations. Further serious investigation and analysis of secret detentions in the North Caucasus is clearly required.

15. The Assembly also regrets that detention centres in Kosovo were not accessible, until very recently, to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture. The lack of access seems all the more unacceptable in light of the fact that the international community intervened in that region with the declared aim of restoring order, peace and the respect for human rights.

16. The Assembly's central objective is to prevent violations of the sort described in this resolution from occurring in the future.

17. The Assembly therefore commends the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for the swift and thorough use of his power of inquiry under Article 52 ECHR.

18. The Assembly calls upon the member States of the Council of Europe to:

18.1. undertake a critical review of the legal framework that regulates the intelligence services, with the dual objective of enhancing their efficiency and strengthening accountability mechanisms against abuse; clear regulations must also govern co-operation with foreign services and the activities of foreign services on national territory;

18.2. ensure that the laws governing state secrecy protect persons who disclose illegal activities of state organs (so-called "whistle-blowers") from disciplinary or criminal sanctions;

18.3. undertake a review of bilateral agreements signed between Council of Europe member States and the United States, particularly those on the status of US forces stationed in Europe and on the use of military and other infrastructures, to ensure that these agreements conform fully to applicable international human rights norms; and

18.4. urge the United States to dismantle its system of secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers and to co-operate more closely with the Council of Europe in establishing common means of overcoming the threat of terrorism in line with international human rights standards and respect for the rule of law.

19. The Assembly also calls on the United States of America, which is an Observer State to the Council of Europe and Europe's long-standing ally in resisting tyranny and defending human rights and the rule of law, to:

19.1. send a strong message to the world by demonstrating that terrorism can be vanquished by lawful means, thereby proving the superiority of the democratic model founded on respect of human dignity;

19.2. co-operate more closely in identifying and employing the most effective means with which to prevent and suppress the terrorist threat in conformity with international human rights norms and the rule of law;

19.3. align its definitions of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment with the definition used by the UN Committee Against Torture;

19.4. prohibit the transfer of persons suspected of involvement in terrorism to countries that practise torture and that fail to guarantee the right to a fair trial;

19.5. issue official apologies and award compensation to the victims of illegal detentions against whom no formal accusations, nor any court proceedings, have ever been brought; and

19.6. refrain from prosecuting any officials, former officials or journalists who, by providing testimony or other information, have helped to bring to light the system of unlawful detentions and mistreatment.

20. The Assembly calls upon its Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights urgently to establish an ad hoc Sub-Committee to continue this inquiry into alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers involving Council of Europe member States, in view of new facts that are still in the process of being uncovered.

21. The Assembly further urges its members to call for rigorous inquiries in their respective national parliaments, especially in those states from which no or insufficient information has been forthcoming.

22. The Assembly recognises, in the context of the present inquiry into secret detentions, that it lacks appropriate investigative powers akin to those provided to parliamentary inquiries in member States, including the powers to subpoena witnesses and compel disclosure of documents, and calls for consideration of this issue.

23. Finally, the Assembly expresses its appreciation to the relevant European Union institutions (European Commission, European Parliament and EU Satellite Centre), as well as to Eurocontrol, for their invaluable contributions to this inquiry, whilst reiterating the Council of Europe's role as the guardian of human rights throughout Europe.

B. Draft recommendation

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution ... (2006) on alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers involving Council of Europe member states.

2. The Assembly also recalls its Resolution 1433 (2005) and its recommendation on the legality of the detention of persons by the United States in Guantanamo Bay.

3. The Assembly urges the Committee of Ministers to draft a recommendation to Council of Europe member States containing:

3.1. common measures to guarantee more effectively the human rights of persons suspected of terrorist offences who are captured from, detained in or transported through Council of Europe member States; and

3.2. a set of minimum requirements for "human rights protection clauses", for inclusion in bilateral and multilateral agreements with third parties, especially those concerning the use of military installations on the territory of Council of Europe member States.

4. The Assembly urgently requests that:

4.1. an initiative be launched on an international level, expressly involving the United States, an Observer to the Council of Europe, to develop a common, truly global strategy to address the terrorist threat. The strategy should conform in all its elements with the fundamental principles of our common heritage in terms of democracy, human rights and respect for the rule of law.

4.2. a proposal be considered, in instances where States are unable or unwilling to prosecute persons accused of terrorist acts, to bring these persons within the jurisdiction of an international court that is competent to try them. One possibility worth considering would be to vest such a competence in the International Criminal Court, whilst renewing invitations to join the Court to the United States and other countries that have not yet done so.

5. The Assembly finally recommends that the Committee of Ministers should consider means of improving the Council of Europe's ability to react rapidly and effectively to allegations of systematic human rights abuse

involving several member States.