

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

British government condemned over torture-obtained intelligence

Agence France Presse
April 5, 2005

LONDON - An influential group of British lawmakers roundly criticised the government on Tuesday for refusing to say whether it made use of intelligence obtained through torture, calling it "surprising and unsettling".

Prime Minister Tony Blair and his ministers should "give straight answers" on the issue, the House of Commons foreign affairs committee said in a toughly-worded report.

The government has repeatedly condemned the use of torture by other nations investigating terrorism, but has also pointedly refused to rule out using information obtained by such means if it could save lives.

Last year, Foreign Secretary Jack Straw told a separate committee of MPs that the government could not ignore intelligence gained overseas by torture if the information could save thousands of people from a terrorist attack.

Such arguments were "compelling", the foreign affairs committee report acknowledged, but insisted that a clearer policy was needed given that Britain is signed up to the United Nations Convention against Torture.

"We recommend that the government set out, in its response to this report, a full and clear explanation of how its policy on the use of evidence gained under torture is consistent with the United Kingdom's international obligations," it said.

In a swift response to the report, Straw said the MPs had made unfair inferences.

"We positively reject this suggestion that British policy in any way condones or encourages torture," he said in a statement.

"I would like to make clear that the British government is vehemently opposed to torture as a matter of fundamental principle."

In their report the MPs also called for the government to speak out more forcefully against the United States's continued detention without trial of terrorism suspects in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq and Afghanistan.

With the last remaining Britons freed recently from Guantanamo Bay, the US detention centre in Cuba, the government "need no longer keep its diplomacy quiet" over the issue, the MPs said.

"US personnel appear to have committed grave violations of human rights of persons held in detention in various facilities in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay and Afghanistan," they said.

"We recommend that the government make it clear to the US administration, both in public and private, that such treatment of detainees is unacceptable."