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## **Afghan Rights Groups Says US Must Come Clean About 'Secret Prisons'**

Agence France Presse

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KABUL, Dec 21 (AFP) - Afghanistan's main rights group demanded Wednesday the United States come clean about reported secret detention centres in the country while an Afghan official played down the existence of such facilities.

New York-based Human Rights Watch said in a report this week that cited inmates as sources, that the United States operated a secret prison near the capital Kabul where detainees were abused and tortured as recently as 2004.

The watchdog's Asia research director Sam Zarifi told AFP at the weekend that US forces were detaining and mistreating people without charge indefinitely at various undisclosed bases around the country.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was asked about the allegations at a media briefing in Kabul Wednesday with President Hamid Karzai, who, after translating the question for him, said: "I am sure you don't have any, say you don't."

"If I had, they would be secret," Rumsfeld replied.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission said the allegations were credible and shocking.

"The revelation of secret detention centres is very shocking and concerning," commissioner and spokesman Nader Nadery said.

"We demand the Afghan government and US-led coalition force make public the name and locations of these detention facilities," he said.

Nadery said the commission had not received complaints from released inmates about abuse in detention facilities but had been told by some prisoners that they had been held in places outside of known US bases.

"Some prisoners released from US detention said that they were held in places which were not in the known US fire bases in the provinces," he said. He would not give further details.

A high-ranking Afghan intelligence official however cast doubt on the existence of secret detention facilities.

"I don't think that the United States -- the coalition or the CIA -- are running such facilities," he said on condition

of anonymity. "The CIA only gathers information and when they detain suspects, they hand them over to us for questioning."

The US military in Afghanistan could not comment.

Human Rights Watch said its attorneys had been told by eight detainees currently being held at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba that they were held at a site near Kabul which they called "Dark Prison."

They said they were chained to walls, deprived of food and drinking water, and kept in darkness with loud rap, heavy metal music, or other sounds blared for weeks at a time, it said in a statement.

Since toppling the Taliban in late 2001, the United States has run an anti-insurgency operation in Afghanistan involving some 19,000 of their troops. During their hunt for the militants the force often detain terror suspects.