

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

Blair's Wife in Swipes US Over Guantanamo 'Torture'

Agence France Presse
March 1, 2006

LONDON, March 1, 2006 (AFP) - The lawyer wife of British prime minister Tony Blair appeared to take a sideswipe at alleged US practices at its Guantanamo Bay detention camp Wednesday when she gave a speech on torture.

Cherie Booth described torture as "the terrorism of the state, usually practised for the same reasons that terrorists use violence: to break the will of those they cannot persuade by lawful means".

She added: "Torture works but not as we intend. Desperate people will say whatever the torturer wants them to say."

Although the facility in Cuba was not mentioned by name, Booth's thinly-veiled reference went further than her husband's statements about the camp.

He has also provoked anger by failing to denounce the US authorities' methods of dealing with terrorist suspects, including the practice of "extraordinary rendition" -- the extra-judicial transfer of security suspects to a third country.

During his weekly question and answer session in parliament Wednesday, Blair went further than his previous statements on Camp X-Ray, which he had only described as an "anomaly" that needed to be resolved.

He said he hoped "the judicial process can be put in place which means that Guantanamo Bay can close".

Former detainees at the facility, including a number of British citizens, have accused the US authorities of using torture to extract information for the "war on terror". Washington insists detainees are treated humanely.

Booth stressed that international treaties banned torture with "no exceptions".

"There can be no derogation from this, even in times of war. The convention could not be more explicit -- no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether there is a state of war, or threat of war, a state of emergency or any other public emergency," she said.

International conventions allowed prosecutions against those who permitted torture from "the foot soldier, commanding officer, political official or head of state", she added.

The speech, organised by Britain's premier foreign policy organisation Chatham House, coincided with the publication of a collection of essays on torture by the US-based Human Rights Watch, to which Booth has contributed.