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## **Vatican Hits Out at Guantanamo**

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VATICAN CITY, March 3, 2006 (AFP) - The Vatican issued a sharp rebuke Friday to the United States over its continued operation of the Guantanamo Bay prison, accusing it of failing to respect human dignity in its treatment of prisoners there.

"It seems clear that in this prison man's dignity is not being respected at all," said Cardinal Renato Martino, the Vatican's "minister" for justice and peace.

The Vatican has not previously commented directly on the controversial prison camp, which the United Nations has demanded that Washington shut down.

"Isn't the lack of rights stamping on the dignity of man. Everyone always has the right to an equitable and just judgement," said Martino, speaking in an interview with Italy's ANSA news agency on his return from a visit to Cuba.

In December, Pope Benedict said in an annual peace message that countries have a duty to respect international humanitarian law even if they are at war.

"If there are inmates who find themselves in such conditions, deprived of their liberty without even knowing what they are charged with -- wherever in the world -- we will not hesitate the defend them," Martino said.

"I want to remind people that even people who have committed crimes remain human beings whose dignity must be respected," the cardinal added.

Some 500 detainees have been held at Guantanamo since January 2002 but only 10 have been formally charged as alleged terrorists. Most were captured soon after the US-led war in Afghanistan against the Taliban regime.

A report by the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva made public last month said inmates had been abused and that it should be closed.