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## **Rice, Merkel Discuss Ex-Prisoner's Claim**

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BERLIN (AP) - German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Tuesday that the United States has admitted making a mistake in the case of a German national who claimed he was wrongfully imprisoned by the CIA.

Merkel spoke during a press conference with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who refused to discuss specifics with reporters.

``When and if mistakes are made, we work very hard to try to correct them," Rice said.

The Washington Post reported Sunday that the U.S. acknowledged last year that the CIA had wrongfully imprisoned Khaled al-Masri, a Lebanese-born German national, for five months. Al-Masri said he was seized while on vacation in Europe last year and then brought to a U.S. prison in Afghanistan, where he was tortured and interrogated for suspected ties to the al-Qaida terrorist group.

The German parliament will soon take up the matter, Merkel said, adding, ``That is appropriate."

Rice is on the first stop of a European tour overshadowed by investigations into whether the United States houses suspected terrorists in secret prisons that violate European legal and human rights guarantees.

Before Rice arrived in Berlin on Monday, a government spokesman said Germany will ask Rice about a government list of more than 400 flights and landings in Germany by planes suspected of being used by the CIA.

Later Tuesday, Rice was flying to Romania, a country identified as a likely site of a secret detention facility run by the CIA. Romania denies it. She will sign a defense cooperation pact related to an air base the advocacy group Human Rights Watch has identified as a probable site for a clandestine prison.

In Berlin, Rice met with Merkel, the country's first leader from the formerly communist East, for about an hour. Merkel pledged last week to put aside past differences between Germany and the United States even as she pressed for the Bush administration to take the CIA prison concerns seriously.

``Let the battles of the past lie - those battles have been fought," Merkel said in her first speech to parliament as chancellor.

The United States is eager to get off on the right foot with Merkel after turbulent relations with the government of blunt Bush opponent Gerhard Schroeder.

Rice met in Washington last week with new German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and promised him an answer on the prison issue.

European governments have expressed outrage over reports of a network of secret Soviet-era prisons in Eastern Europe where detainees may have been harshly treated and reports of CIA flights carrying al-Qaida prisoners through European airports.

Several countries have denied they hosted such sites. If the United States did operate such prisons, or is still doing so, the information would be classified. The Bush administration has refused to answer questions about it in public.

“Were I to confirm or deny, say yes or say no, then I would be compromising intelligence information, and I'm not going to do that,” Rice told reporters on her plane to Germany. Before leaving Washington, Rice told reporters that fighting terrorism is “a two-way street” and that Europeans are safer for tough but legal U.S. tactics.

The general issue of U.S. treatment of detainees in the war on terror has been an irritant in relations with Europe and other parts of the world since shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

It gained new immediacy last month with a Washington Post report claiming the U.S. ran prisons in Thailand, Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, and claims by Human Rights Watch that it had tracked CIA flights into Eastern Europe.

Rice's trip to Germany, Romania, Ukraine and Belgium is meant to build on generally improved relations between Europe and the United States after a period of strain over the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The war remains widely unpopular in Europe, as does President Bush.

The strongly critical press coverage of the prison question and complaints from European legislators suggest suspicions about U.S. motives remain close to the surface.

Britain and other European countries have protested conditions and indefinite detention at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and Europe was highly critical of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal in Iraq.

Rice said America does not practice torture or knowingly transport any detainee to a place “where he or she will be tortured.”

That declaration was welcomed by British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. He said, “All of us must work together - within the rule of law - to use every tool at our disposal to deal with the threat of terrorism.”

Several European governments have voiced concerns over U.S. transport of terrorism suspects to other countries. Rice defended such transfers, saying they “take terrorists out of action, and save lives.”

Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have protested the prisoner transfers, or renditions.

Amnesty International said Monday that six planes used by the CIA for renditions have made some 800 flights in or out of European airspace, including 50 landings at Shannon International Airport in Ireland.

In Dublin, former U.N. human rights chief Mary Robinson said the Bush administration remains "ambivalent about what constitutes torture" and hasn't made clear whether it is shipping terror suspects secretly through countries such as Ireland.