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House of Commons Panel Urges Britain to Denounce Guantanamo Camp

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LONDON (AP) - A House of Commons committee urged the British government on Thursday to publicly object to the continued existence of the Guantanamo Bay prison camp, but Prime Minister Tony Blair said he had nothing more to say on the subject.

"I think I have said really all I want to say on Guantanamo," Blair told reporters at his monthly news conference. "I've said it's an anomaly, I've said it should end sooner rather than later. I don't think I've got anything more to say on it."

Blair spoke shortly after the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee said Guantanamo was high among its human rights concerns.

"The continued use of Guantanamo Bay as a detention center outside all legal regimes diminishes the USA's moral authority and is a hindrance to the effective pursuit of the war against terrorism," the report said.

"We recommend that the government make loud and public its objections to the existence of such a prison regime."

All nine British citizens who were detained at Guantanamo were released in 2004 and 2005. Six British residents who hold other citizenship remain in the camp.

Asked again about Guantanamo, Blair repeated his frequent plea for understanding the U.S. position.

"It is important that we never forget the context in which this has happened -- which is the context of the war in Afghanistan and the reason for that was the slaughter of 3,000 innocent people on Sept. 11," Blair said.

"Now it is important of course that we pursue the action against terrorism maintaining absolutely our commitment to proper civil liberties and human rights," he said. "It's also important that we remember those people that died in that terrorist act and have some understanding therefore of the huge amount of anger that there is in America over what happened there."

The Commons committee also urged the government to press the United States for more information about extraordinary rendition flights, in which terrorist suspects are moved among countries outside normal legal channels.

The British government has insisted that no extraordinary rendition flights have transited through Britain, though news reports have suggested that some 200 flights have passed through British airspace.

While noting that the government has joined in European Union efforts to get more information about rendition flights and allegations of secret prisons, the committee said: "We seriously regret that the government failed to request information at a bilateral level and that only after prodding by European Union member states has the government made any effort to investigate serious allegations."

"There is a process and a procedure in place where the Americans ask our permission if they want to rendite," Blair said. "I am not prepared simply to assume that they are breaching that undertaking. I think it would be very strange if they did."

Blair said he believes too much public debate has been devoted to suggesting the United States is "basically returning people to countries for torture" when what should be examined is "the threat that we face and America faces from terrorism."

Those who argue suspects who may be "engaging actively in inciting terrorism" should remain in Britain as they may face torture elsewhere have "got the world the wrong way round," Blair said.