

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

U.N. Torture Investigator Asks EU to Push for Guantanamo Closure

Paul Ames
Associated Press
March 16, 2006

BRUSSELS, Belgium – The U.N. torture investigator on Thursday urged U.S. allies in Europe to push Washington to close the prison for terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Manfred Nowak suggested European nations should help the U.S. by offering to try some of the detainees or set up an international terrorism tribunal as part of the effort to close the naval base prison.

About 490 detainees are being held at Guantanamo, accused of links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or al-Qaeda. Only a handful have been charged.

Their continued detention "is illegal under international human rights law," Nowak said at EU headquarters in Brussels. He said the detainees should be given fair trials or set free.

Nowak, the special U.N. investigator on torture, was one of the authors of a U.N. report last month that said the U.S. must close Guantanamo.

"I hope that the European Union will take up our main recommendation in their dialogue with the United States," Nowak said. "The main recommendation is to close as quickly as possible the Guantanamo Bay detention facilities."

"What we are advocating is a burden sharing, in particular between Europe and the United States," Nowak said. "It's not enough just to call for a closure of Guantanamo Bay, but perhaps some of the European countries could take some of the detainees, bring them before their courts."

Although the U.S. has rejected calls to shut Guantanamo, Nowak said pressure from allies could persuade Washington to close the center. "I am still fairly confident that Guantanamo will be closed," he said.

The European Parliament and EU governments such as Germany have called for Guantanamo's closure, but the EU has not taken a united position.