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## **U.N. Expert Wants To See Purported Prisons**

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GENEVA -- The United Nations' special investigator on torture said Thursday he was certain that there are secret U.S. prisons in Europe and he wants access to them.

Manfred Nowak said he had proof that secret U.S. prisons continue to operate in Europe.

"I am 100 percent sure. I have evidence," Nowak said in an interview with The Associated Press.

He cited a U.S. refusal to provide details or records of interrogations later used in terrorism trials in Germany. He did not explain how that was proof of the ongoing existence of U.S. prisons in Europe, and he did not offer other examples.

Allegations of clandestine U.S. detention centers in Europe have sparked separate investigations by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe, the continent's leading human rights watchdog.

"It is totally unacceptable, even in the fight against terrorism, that a highly democratic country such as the United States of America is keeping secret places of detention," said Nowak, an Austrian law professor who reports on torture allegations to U.N. rights bodies and the General Assembly.

U.S. officials in Geneva were not immediately available to comment.

The United States neither confirms nor denies the allegations of secret prisons, because it refuses to comment on intelligence matters. It has noted that the Council of Europe's report found no specific evidence to support claims of the existence of detention camps in Europe like the one in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

In a report released last month, Nowak and four other U.N. experts called on the U.S. government to close down Guantanamo Bay and "refrain from any practice amounting to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment."

The United States slammed the U.N. report, noting that the U.N. experts had declined an invitation to visit the camp because they would not be given full access to the detainees.

As with Guantanamo, Nowak said he would only visit the secret prisons if he was granted full access to prisoners. He noted that Beijing had allowed him to interview prisoners during a visit to China last year and that before that trip Washington pressured the Chinese to permit the interviews.

He said that he hoped Washington would reconsider its policy on terror suspects and allow him to investigate allegations of torture in detention centers outside the United States.

"How can I assess whether torture or ill-treatment is practiced in any prison in the world if the only people with whom I can talk are the prison guards and the doctors, but not the detainees?" he asked.

The United States is holding about 490 men at the military detention center; some have been there for more than four years. They are accused of links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or to al-Qaida, but only a handful have been charged.

Nowak also said that he would go to Chechnya this year because Russia had accepted his condition of direct access to prisoners. He declined to speculate on how widespread the use of torture by Russian security forces might be in the volatile southern province, and said he was still negotiating with Moscow on which detention centers to visit.