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Former Guantanamo Detainees Reunite for Conference on Torture and Secret Detentions

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LONDON (AP) - Amnesty International called on the European Commission to investigate reported secret U.S. detention facilities in Europe on Friday, as a former detainee at Guantanamo Bay warned of more terror attacks if such facilities aren't shut down.

Amnesty and Reprieve, a London-based group that works on death penalty cases and human rights issues, are holding a three-day conference on torture, secret detentions and renditions of terror suspects. Several former Guantanamo prisoners are participating.

"Guantanamo must be shut down. If it continues, I can almost guarantee that violence and terrorism will only proliferate," said Moazzam Begg, 37, who was held at Guantanamo for three years without charge, and now lives in Birmingham. "Hatred breeds hatred."

More than 500 men accused of links to Afghanistan's ousted Taliban regime or the al-Qaida terror network are still being held at the U.S. prison camp in eastern Cuba -- many of whom have been held without charge or access to attorneys for nearly four years.

Adding to criticism of the camp are allegations that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had transported terror suspects to Poland and Romania.

"I think that the European Commission should investigate these abuses," Amnesty International's Secretary-General Irene Kahn said at the opening of the conference.

Earlier this month, the European Commission -- the European Union's executive office -- promised to launch an informal probe, requesting answers from all 25 EU member states and candidate countries Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Turkey. Some members of the European Parliament, however, have asked for a formal investigation.

Begg and others have said detainees at Guantanamo spoke of being held for months at secret detentions centers prior to their arrival in Guantanamo.

A group of Yemeni men say they were held in solitary confinement in a secret, underground U.S. detention facility in an unknown country and interrogated by masked men for more than 18 months without being charged or allowed any contact with the outside world.

Another -- a refugee from Ethiopia who lived in Britain -- claims he was interrogated in Morocco where guards cut his penis repeatedly with a razor blade, according to Clive Stafford Smith, an attorney helping dozens of Guantanamo detainees to challenge their detentions.

"It is very important to see the human face of torture," Stafford Smith said.

Another former detainee, Rustam Ahkmiarov, 26, from Russia, said he has been stigmatized as a terrorist since being released from Guantanamo. He was captured in Pakistan after studying the Quran at a religious school in Karachi.

"It still feels like I'm in prison," he said. "I've lost three jobs after I returned. People talk about me like I'm a terrorist. They point at me. I have no life any longer."

Begg, meanwhile, says he lives every day with the guilt that he -- not others -- is free.

Although he was never charged, Begg was accused being an aide to al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden -- a U.S. allegation that he denies.

He said the British government has refused to recognize the connection between prisons and terrorist attacks, such as the attacks in which four suspected suicide bombers killed 52 people in London on July 7.

"Part of the denial that (Prime Minister) Tony Blair has taken since the July 7 bombings has to do with Guantanamo. He is not in tune with the political reality of how people feel about this issue," Begg said.

Two U.N. rights experts, meanwhile, said Friday they will not visit the Guantanamo Bay military prison because U.S. officials barred them from talking privately with detained terror suspects, making it impossible for the monitors to fairly assess the conditions there.

"Now we will issue a report and take the matter to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in the spring," said Paul Hunt, one of the U.N. observers who attended the conference Friday.