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China: U.S. poor example on rights

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BEIJING -- China accused the United States on Thursday of using double standards to judge human rights in other countries, adding to a growing list of nations suggesting the government that produced the Abu Ghraib prison abuses has no business commenting on what happens elsewhere.

"No country should exclude itself from the international human-rights development process or view itself as the incarnation of human rights that can reign over other countries and give orders to the others," Premier Wen Jiabao's Cabinet declared, three days after the State Department criticized China in its annual human-rights report.

The sharp Chinese retort, which contained a long list of what it labeled U.S. human-rights abuses at home and abroad, came directly from Wen's Cabinet, giving it more weight than a Foreign Ministry comment or an editorial. In addition, it used unusually frank language, charging that the United States "frequently commits wanton slaughters during external invasions and military attacks."

Amnesty International, the human-rights organization, noted that the Bush administration has turned over prisoners arrested in the battle against terrorism to the same countries it cites in the report for torturing prisoners. Human-rights activists long have charged that U.S. intelligence officers resorted to this practice, called rendition, to get around U.S. restrictions on torture.

The acting assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor, Michael Kozak, acknowledged when his report came out Monday that the U.S. does not have a perfect record. But he argued that Americans who commit abuses, such as the soldiers at Abu Ghraib, are being court-martialed and that interrogation techniques used at Guantanamo are being challenged in U.S. courts.

The Chinese statement issued Thursday dismissed this defense as legal window dressing, suggesting Abu Ghraib and other instances of abuse were not exceptions but reflected the Bush administration's policy.

China broke off a formal human-rights dialogue with the Bush administration a year ago, after the U.S. sponsored a resolution condemning China at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.