

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

## **Rights Group Says Torture is Part of U.S. Policy**

The head of Human Rights Watch said abuse of prisoners "has been devastating to U.S. credibility."

Bob Deans  
Cox News Service  
January 19, 2006

Torture and mistreatment of prisoners have become "a deliberate, central part" of the Bush administration's antiterrorism interrogation practices, the advocacy group Human Rights Watch alleged yesterday.

Such treatment has compromised the United States as a voice for human rights around the world and "has been devastating to U.S. credibility" on the subject, said Kenneth Roth, executive director of the New York-based rights group.

Roth, in Washington to release the organization's annual report on human rights in nearly 70 countries, called for an independent, bipartisan investigation into U.S. policies concerning detainees. He repeated an earlier appeal for President Bush to appoint a special prosecutor to examine allegations of abuse.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan disputed the report. After reading news accounts of the report, McClellan accused the group of basing its conclusions "more on a political agenda than on facts."

McClellan said the report had undermined the group's credibility.

"When a group like this makes some of these assertions, it diminishes the effectiveness of that organization," said McClellan, "because the United States is a leader when it comes to advancing freedom and promoting democracy. We are the leader."

Earlier in the day, Bush met with a group of Iraqis, several of whom said they had been imprisoned or tortured under Saddam Hussein's government, which was toppled by the U.S.-led invasion three years ago.

By ridding Iraq of a torturer and ousting the Taliban in Afghanistan, the United States has freed about 50 million people from oppression, McClellan said.

Amid news reports of detainees being mistreated by U.S. forces at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo, Bay, Cuba, reports surfaced last fall that the Bush administration had set up a global network of secret prisons where detainees could be interrogated beyond the reach of U.S. laws.

The administration tried unsuccessfully to roll back legislation sponsored by Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.) to limit U.S. intelligence officers and others to the interrogation techniques spelled out in U.S. military field manuals.

Bush has repeatedly said that U.S. forces and civilian interrogators do not torture prisoners.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the global antiterrorism campaign has replaced the Cold War as a U.S. justification for condoning, and in some cases conducting, human-rights abuses, Roth told reporters.

The U.S. treatment of prisoners, however, is hurting the antiterror campaign, by fueling anger across the Muslim and Arab worlds, he said. It is also creating a pool of detainees who cannot be prosecuted in U.S. courts - even if there is evidence that they are guilty of crimes - because due process requires that prisoners not be mistreated, he said.

"Violating human rights doesn't help in fighting terrorism," Roth said. "In fact, it probably makes things worse."

While denying that they employ torture, administration officials have said that assertive interrogation techniques have helped produce valuable information that has aided efforts to combat terrorist groups and thwart planned operations against the United States and its partners.