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Goldsmith Backs Guantanamo Critics

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THE Government's senior legal adviser, Lord Goldsmith, backed critics of the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay last night by saying that nobody should be treated as an outlaw.

The Attorney General's comments, in a lecture at the London School of Economics, came a day after Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, likened the US base in Cuba to a Soviet-style gulag.

Last week, the Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Hain, called for its closure, but Tony Blair said only that it was an "anomaly" that would have to be dealt with at some point.

Stressing that the rule of law "is, or should be, of universal application," Lord Goldsmith said there should be no people to whom the law does not apply and to whom anything could therefore be done.

"Some would not accept this" he continued in an apparent reference to the US government.

"It is a bitter pill to swallow for those who have seen and experienced the devastation that results from terrorist outrages to see systems established to protect the legal rights of those they believe responsible for them."

Those terrorists did not have "a single shred of concern for the legal or human rights of those they would kill, maim and terrorise."

But, Lord Goldsmith continued, "in confronting terrorism we are fighting for the safety of our citizens but also for the preservation of our democratic way of life, our right to freedom of thought and expression and our commitment to the rule of law."

These were the very liberties that terrorists sought to destroy by creating a climate of fear. "This is why it is important, as the Defence Secretary, John Reid, made clear the other day, not to allow respect, sympathy and understanding for the position in which our soldiers find themselves, which we all naturally share, to be treated as a call for British forces to operate outside the law."

Any prosecutions would be brought in a British court. As a result, British troops need have no fear of being brought before the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which has jurisdiction only where national authorities are unwilling or unable to act.