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Guantanamo Bay

Editorial
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When Amnesty International called the prison at Guantanamo Bay "the gulag of our times," Vice President Dick Cheney pronounced himself offended. More offensive is Cheney likening Gitmo's cages and dormitories to Club Med.

"They're very well treated down there. They're living in the tropics," the vice president told CNN.

"They're well fed. They've got everything they could possibly want."

Not exactly.

Amnesty International's report was scathing. UN human rights experts claim "persistent and credible" evidence of torture. And according to at least one FBI agent cited in Congress last week, barbaric barely conveys the living conditions:

"On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor, with no chair, food or water. Most times they urinated or defecated on themselves, and had been left there for 18-24 hours or more.

"On one occasion, the air conditioning had been turned down so far and the temperature was so cold in the room, that the barefooted detainee was shaking with cold. ...

"On another occasion, the (air conditioner) had been turned off, making the temperature in the unventilated room well over 100 degrees. The detainee was almost unconscious on the floor, with a pile of hair next to him. He had apparently been literally pulling his hair out throughout the night."

That's the part of U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin's speech that got lost when the Illinois Democrat joined the growing list of people who overplay Holocaust references, bringing on no little condemnation.

The criticism was legitimate, but Cheney's dismissive minimizing of the conditions at Guantanamo is equally ridiculous.

The United States has blocked UN human rights inspectors from visiting the base for years.

If it is so critical to U.S. safety that Gitmo remain the war on terror's holding cell, then the White House should make sure it is protecting prisoners' rights -- including allowing for the independent reviews.

It sways no one by suggesting detainees are lounging in the tropics.