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U.S. Tells U.N. That It Continues to Oppose Torture in Any Situation

DAVID STOUT
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WASHINGTON - The United States told the United Nations on Friday that despite the abuse of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison, it continued to oppose torture.

"The United States is unequivocally opposed to the use and practice of torture," the Bush administration declared in a report to the United Nations Committee Against Torture, adding that "no circumstance whatsoever, including war, the threat of war, internal political stability" or any other dire situation can justify torture, the report said.

But while the United States vowed to continue investigating suspected abuses at Abu Ghraib, as well as complaints about the treatment of detainees at the American naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, it fell short, in the view of critics.

Elisa Massimino, the Washington director of Human Rights First, formerly the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, said the report failed to address "ghost detainees," people held incommunicado by the C.I.A. and kept isolated.

"I don't know how the United States expects to explain its torture-prevention policy without mentioning its ghost-detainee problem," she said.

The report was prepared by the Department of State in connection with the Departments of Justice, Defense and Homeland Security and submitted to the United Nations committee in Geneva. Under a 1994 treaty condemning torture, the United States and about 140 nations report to the United Nations every four years.

Critics have asserted that President Bush and his top aides created an atmosphere that, intentionally or otherwise, led to the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere and allowed high officials to escape punishment for wrongs committed by subordinates.

But the report, whose thrust was reported in The Wall Street Journal on Thursday, sought to dispel those suspicions. "When allegations of abuses arise, they in all cases will be investigated and, if substantiated, prosecuted," the document said.

The World Organization for Human Rights U.S.A. also said the report fell short. It condemned the practice of sending suspected terrorists to countries where they are questioned under rough circumstances.