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Close the Jail Guantanamo is an Affront to American Principles

Editorial
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Here we go again on Guantanamo. The U.N. Human Rights Commission has issued a report that denounces practices at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay and calls for its closure.

Although it's important to note that the 53-nation commission includes some countries that have lamentable rights records (like China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia and Zimbabwe), what the United States is doing at Guantanamo is inconsistent with American standards of justice and human rights.

Some 500 prisoners are being held in U.S. military custody at the base in Cuba -- some detained for nearly five years, almost all without trial, kept outside the continental United States so that courts cannot apply U.S. standards of justice. The U.N. report says the methods of interrogation that U.S. officials are using on the prisoners are tantamount to torture. Whether that is accurate, what is true is that some prisoners are being force-fed to thwart the hunger strike they have mounted to attract international attention.

Bush administration officials have responded to the report with their usual tactics, sliming the source instead of addressing the charges. They point out, correctly, that the U.N. officials who prepared the report did not interview the prisoners. However, the five U.N. investigators -- from Argentina, Austria, New Zealand, Algeria and Pakistan -- had sought U.S. invitations to visit Guantanamo since 2002; three were finally invited last year but refused to go after learning they could not interview prisoners.

Regardless of the credibility of the U.N. charges or of the U.S. riposte to the report, what's going on at Guantanamo is inconsistent with the principles of justice, freedom and human rights that the Bush administration -- and most Americans -- consider integral to the United States.

Initially, there were two good reasons to hold prisoners at Guantanamo. The first was that they may have had fresh information that could have headed off another 9/11-type assault. The second was that they may have been involved in the 9/11 attacks or in combat against U.S. forces. The first reason is no longer valid four years after Sept. 11 and, if the second applies, the prisoners should be brought to trial and sentenced for their crimes.

Otherwise, let them go and close the Guantanamo jail. There is no reason for the United States to continue to be repudiated internationally, even among its friends, for the abomination to American principles that Guantanamo has become. If information does not exist to bring prisoners in an American jail to trial in an American court, then there should not be -- in Cuba, Europe or anywhere -- a prison where they can be held beyond the hand of justice.

It just isn't American to do what's being done at Guantanamo.