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## **U.S. Torture Envoy Confident of Visit to Guantanamo**

Reuters  
April 4, 2005

GENEVA – The U.N. investigator into torture said on Monday he was confident the United States would grant his request to visit its base at Guantanamo Bay, where rights activists say detainees face inhumane treatment.

Some nine months after the request was made, Austrian law professor Manfred Nowak said there were signs the U.S. would agree to let him and other U.N. human rights envoys travel to the naval base in Cuba.

"I should say that I am fairly confident that at least to Guantanamo Bay a visit can still be carried out this year, but there is no invitation yet," he said in a brief statement following a meeting with U.S. officials.

The envoys, including the U.N.'s investigator into arbitrary detention, asked last June to inspect conditions in Guantanamo and prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan, where U.S. forces hold suspected militants.

But a U.S. official in Geneva, where the U.N. Commission on Human Rights is holding its annual session, merely confirmed a meeting had taken place with the envoys and that Washington would consider their request.

"The next step is that the envoys must get back to us with more details of the request, and then we will respond appropriately," said the official, adding that there had been a "good discussion" at the meeting.

The investigators, known as rapporteurs, issued their request last year soon after the publication of photographs from the U.S.-run Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad showed prisoners, some in hoods, being sexually humiliated by soldiers and intimidated by dogs.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the United States holds some 400 prisoners in Afghanistan, over 7,000 in Iraq and some 550 in Guantanamo, where many have been detained for over three years without trial.

Washington admits some abuses, but says that they were the individual actions of a small number of soldiers, some of whom have already been tried or face military courts.

But ACLU, which has taken the U.S. administration to court to force the release of thousands of documents on the detentions, said the papers showed "abuse and torture of prisoners is not irregular or isolated, but rather widespread and systematic."

In a statement, it urged the Commission, whose six-week annual session runs until April 22, to demand that the United States halt all torture and inhumane treatment and agree to the visit by the rapporteurs.

"Nearly a year after the Abu Ghraib torture and abuses came to public light, serious violations of human rights continue to be committed in U.S.-controlled detention centres," said Jamil Dakwar, an ACLU lawyer.