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Guantanamo Fuels Hatred, Boosts Al Qaeda - Report

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BRUSSELS - The United States must close Guantanamo prison, where its treatment of some 500 terrorism suspects encourages hatred towards the West and bolsters Muslim membership of the al Qaeda network, a new report concludes.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) commissioned the report from its human rights representative, Belgian senate president Anne-Marie Lizin, and will vote next week whether to accept its findings.

"A generation of young Muslims, fed on the images of Abu Ghraib, of the treatment reserved for the Guantanamo detainees and rumours about profanation of the Koran, will have filled the al Qaeda ranks and those of other extremist groups," said the report made public on Friday.

"The longer the detention is in the camps the more the hatred against the U.S. and the West becomes anchored in hearts and minds," it said.

"Being fully aware of the U.S. authorities' dilemma between national and world security and long procedures, we recommend terminating the Guantanamo detention facility by announcing a calendar of closure."

In June, the U.S. military described cases of mishandling of the Koran by U.S. personnel at Guantanamo naval base in Cuba, including splashing it with urine and kicking it. Muslims view the Koran as the literal word of God.

U.S. UNDER PRESSURE

The U.S. government, increasingly under pressure at home to close the prison down, has said it is key to protecting the country from further attacks. Last week it said it was addressing abuse claims and holding prison staff to account.

The OSCE, consisting of 55 member nations from Europe, North America and the former Soviet republics, is an organisation that aims to maintain security and flag conflicts and human rights issues in its region. The United States is a member.

Guantanamo mostly holds prisoners scooped up in Afghanistan during the U.S. offensive there in retaliation for the Sept. 11 al Qaeda attacks on the United States.

Human rights groups as well as institutions such as the European Parliament and the Council of Europe have criticised the United States for holding detainees there for indefinite periods and not assigning them "prisoner of war" status.

Instead, suspects are labelled "enemy combatants", something the new report called a legal nonentity under international law. If charged with crimes, they stand in front of a military tribunal which can demand capital punishment.

On Thursday, Lizin made news this week when she cancelled a meeting in Brussels with the Iranian parliament speaker after the visitor, a strict observer of Islam, said he would not shake hands with the female senate president.

