

The following text may be printed, copy/pasted, or downloaded and emailed.

Amnesty USA-'Don't Know for Sure' About Guantanamo

Lori Santos
Reuters
June 5, 2005

WASHINGTON - Despite highly publicized charges of U.S. mistreatment of prisoners at Guantanamo, the head of the Amnesty International USA said on Sunday the group doesn't "know for sure" that the military is running a "gulag."

Executive Director William Schulz said Amnesty, often cited worldwide for documenting human rights abuses, also had no information about whether Secretary Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld approved severe torture methods such as beatings and starvation.

Schulz recently dubbed Rumsfeld an "apparent high-level architect of torture" in asserting he approved interrogation methods that violated international law.

"It would be fascinating to find out. I have no idea," Schulz told "Fox News Sunday."

A weeks-long dispute has raged since Amnesty compared the prison for foreign terrorism suspects at the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to the vast, brutal Soviet gulag system of forced labor camps in which millions of prisoners died.

There have been a number of accusations of American mistreatment of the detainees and of the Koran, the Islamic holy book, at the base.

The U.S. military on Friday released details about five cases in which the Koran was kicked, stepped on and soaked in water. Top officials say they were among 10 such cases reported among more than 28,000 prisoner interrogations.

Schulz said, "We don't know for sure what all is happening at Guantanamo and our whole point is that the United States ought to allow independent human rights organizations to investigate."

He also said he had "absolutely no idea" whether the International Red Cross had been given access to all prisoners and said the group feared others were being held at secret facilities or locations.

President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and, most recently, Rumsfeld have repudiated the report with the defense secretary branding it "reprehensible."

The United States holds about 520 men at Guantanamo, where they are denied rights accorded under international law to prisoners of war. Many have been held without charge for more than three years.

Schulz noted that it was Amnesty's headquarters in London that issued the annual report on global human rights, which said Guantanamo Bay "has become the gulag of our times."

Asked about the comparison, Schulz said, "Clearly this is not an exact or a literal analogy."

"... But there are some similarities. The United States is maintaining an archipelago of prisons around the world, many of them secret prisons into which people are being literally disappeared ... And in some cases, at least, we know that they are being mistreated, abused, tortured and even killed."

"And whether the Americans like it or not, it does reflect how the more than 2 million Amnesty members in a hundred countries around the world and indeed the vast majority of those countries feel about the United States' detention policy," he added.