

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

An Administration's Amnesty Amnesia

Dana Milbank
Washington Post
June 5, 2005

The folks at Amnesty International are practically begging for a one-way ticket to Gitmo. After the human rights group issued a report late last month calling the U.S. detention center in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, "the gulag of our times," top officials raced to condemn Amnesty.

President Bush: "It's absurd. It's an absurd allegation."

Vice President Cheney: "I don't take them seriously. . . . Frankly, I was offended by it."

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld: "Reprehensible . . . cannot be excused."

Funny -- these officials had a different view of Amnesty when it was criticizing other countries.

Rumsfeld repeatedly cited Amnesty when he was making the case against Saddam Hussein, urging "a careful reading of Amnesty International" and saying that according to "Amnesty International's description of what they know has gone on, it's not a happy picture."

The White House often cited Amnesty to make the case for war in Iraq, using the group's allegations that Iraq executed dozens of women accused of prostitution, decapitated victims and displayed their heads, tortured political opponents and raped detainees' relatives, gouged out eyes, and used electric shocks.

Regarding Fidel Castro's Cuba, meanwhile, the White House joined Amnesty and other groups in condemning Castro's "callous disregard for due process."

And the State Department's most recent annual report on worldwide human rights abuses cites Amnesty's findings dozens of times.

"This administration eagerly cites Amnesty International research when we criticize Cuba and extensively quoted our criticism of the violations in Iraq under Saddam Hussein in the run-up to the war," protested William F. Schulz, executive director of Amnesty International USA.

But Schulz isn't protesting too much. In the past week, traffic on Amnesty's Web site has gone up sixfold, donations have quintupled and new memberships have doubled.