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World Churches Say U.S. Violates Law at Guantanamo

Reuters
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GENEVA - The World Council of Churches (WCC), the main global body uniting non-Catholic Christians, accused the United States on Monday of violating international law in its treatment of detainees at its Guantanamo naval base.

The Council, which includes many U.S. churches in its 342-church membership, also called on the administration of President Bush to grant full legal rights to the some 600 foreign nationals detained at a camp on the base in Cuba.

The prisoners there "are held without due process and in total violation of the norms and standards of international humanitarian and human rights law," a statement issued by the Council's Central Committee declared.

The statement was supported by the U.S. National Council of Churches (NCC), which links 36 Protestant, Orthodox and Afro-American communities across the country and has been campaigning for the detainees to be granted due legal process.

Bush is a fervent Christian, and the backing of evangelical Christians in several key states helped secure his re-election last November.

The Council statement, issued after a session of its steering Central Committee, also called on the administration to allow the NCC to visit the detainees -- many held since the end of 2001 as part of the administration's "war on terror."

It also called on all NCC churches to educate their congregations on the situation of those held at the base and to urge believers to call "for the release of those being held in detention under inhuman conditions."

In another statement, the WCC called for international talks on ending the presence of the U.S.-led military coalition in Iraq and the removal of military bases there.

Although recent elections in Iraq provided "a ray of hope for the millions of citizens who went to the polls, the crisis in Iraq persists at the expense of the Iraqi people," the statement said.

In a clear criticism of Bush and his leading ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, it said "Leaders who used the false pretexts of terrorist connections and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq to bolster their case for war will be judged by history."