

On January 14 the following letter was sent by the Lawyers Committee to Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz regarding allegations that the Bush administration has used, condoned, or facilitated torture by third countries in the interrogation of prisoners. The Lawyers Committee calls upon the administration to openly address these allegations.

January 14, 2003

The Honorable Paul Wolfowitz
Deputy Secretary of Defense
1010 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1010

Dear Secretary Wolfowitz:

We are writing to express our appreciation for the discussion we had with you on December 19th and to raise an issue of great concern to us that has arisen since that meeting.

We very much welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and appreciate the amount of time you spent with us going over these difficult issues. Your agreement that respect for human rights is essential to winning the struggle against terrorism was both important and gratifying. We are working to follow-up on a number of the issues we discussed and we hope that this was only the first of many meetings with you and senior officials at the Department of Defense.

As you are no doubt aware, since our meeting the Washington Post reported that the Bush Administration has used, tacitly condoned or facilitated torture by third countries in the interrogation of prisoners. The report is so flagrantly at odds with your statements during our meeting that we trust that you are equally disturbed by it.

The President has repeatedly declared that the United States will always stand firm on the non-negotiable demands of human dignity. Surely there is no more basic and less negotiable requirement of human dignity than the right to be free of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. As you know, under the Torture Convention “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever” may be invoked to justify torture and no party may return or extradite a person to another state where there are “substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.”

The Administration’s response to the outrageous statements made by numerous unnamed officials to the Post’s reporters has thus far been wholly inadequate. It was issued by a relative junior official and it was narrow and technical. Whatever the truth of the Post’s allegations, without a more authoritative response to this high-profile story the world will

conclude that the United States is not practicing what it preaches. America's authority as a champion of human rights will be seriously damaged.

What is clearly needed in this instance are unequivocal statements by the President and his Cabinet officers that torture in any form or manner will not be tolerated by this Administration, that any US official found to have used or condoned torture will be held accountable, and that the United States would neither seek nor rely upon intelligence obtained through torture in a third country. These statements need to be accompanied by clear written guidance applicable to everyone engaged in the interrogation and rendition of prisoners strictly prohibiting the use or tolerance of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners and mandating full compliance with the Geneva conventions requirements for the treatment of prisoners.

Again, we welcomed the opportunity to meet with you and hope that you will work to insure that the President, Secretary Rumsfeld and other senior Administration officials send a strong and clear message that torture will not be tolerated or facilitated by this Administration.

Sincerely,

William Schulz
Amnesty International U.S.A.

Ashley Barr
The Carter Center

Kenneth Roth
Human Rights Watch

Gay McDougall
International Human Rights Law Group

Louise Kantrow
International League for Human Rights

Michael Posner
Lawyers Committee for Human Rights

Robin Phillips
Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights

Len Rubenstein
Physicians for Human Rights

Todd Howland
RFK Memorial Center for Human Rights