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USA: 800 secret CIA flights into and out of Europe

Amnesty International today revealed that six planes used by the CIA for renditions have made some 800 flights in or out of European airspace including 50 landings at Shannon airport in the Republic of Ireland.

The information contradicts assurances given last week by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the Irish Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern, that Ireland's Shannon airport had not been used for "untoward" purposes, or as a transit point for terror suspects.

The organisation also rejected assertions by the US Secretary of State as she began a four-nation tour of Europe. In a statement today, Ms Rice argued that rendition -- transferring detainees from country to country without legal process -- was permissible under international law. Although the victims of rendition usually end up in countries known to use torture in their interrogations, Ms Rice added that the US government seeks assurances on treatment from receiving nations.

"Flying detainees to countries where they may face torture or other ill-treatment is a direct and outright breach on international law with or without so called "diplomatic assurances". These assurances are meaningless. Countries known for systematic torture, regularly deny the existence of such practices," said Claudio Cordone, Amnesty International's Senior Director of Regional Programmes.

Amnesty international has obtained flight records for six CIA-chartered planes from September 2001 to September of 2005. According to the US Federal Aviation Administration over this period, these planes landed 50 times in Shannon and took off 35 times, suggesting that some flights were kept secret. Although Shannon airport is used as a refuelling stop for the US military, none of the planes were military transport planes. In total for this period, the six planes made some 800 flights originating or landing in Europe.

The planes include:

- Boeing 737-7ET, call sign N313P (Later re-registered as N4476S). The largest of the six planes, with 32 seats, is owned by Premier Executive Transport Services, a CIA front company that also owns N379P. N313P has been frequently seen at US military bases, including in Afghanistan.
- Gulfstream V: call sign N379P (Later re-registered as N8068V and then as N44982): this plane, which has made more than 50 trips to the US detention centre in Guantanamo Bay, has been nicknamed "The Guantanamo Bay Express". It was also used in the CIA rendition of Ahmed Agiza and Mohammed al-Zari from Sweden to Egypt.
- Gulfstream III: N829MG (Later re-registered as N259SK). This plane took dual Syrian-Canadian national Maher Arar from the US to Syria where he was

detained for 13 months' without charge, during which time he was tortured. He was finally released in October 2003.

- GulfstreamIV, call sign N85VM (Later re-registered as N227SV), the plane that took Abu Omar to Egypt from Germany after his kidnapping in Italy, turned around and flew to Shannon. The plane's flight log also shows visits to Afghanistan, Morocco, Dubai, Jordan, Italy, Japan, Switzerland, Azerbaijan and the Czech Republic.

Amnesty International is publishing the information after a challenge by the Irish Foreign Minister Dermot Ahern on Thursday last week. Asked about CIA planes using Shannon airport, the Foreign Minister said, "If anyone has any evidence of any of these flights please give me a call and I will have it immediately investigated." On 17 Feb 2003, for instance, the Gulfstream IV, N85VM took Abu Omar from Ramstein to Cairo, then turned around and flew to Shannon, arriving at 0552 on the 18th.

The latest information confirms other persistent and reliable reports in the media and by non-governmental organizations that CIA-chartered flights are used for renditions. Amnesty International only has partial flight logs for six planes whilst the CIA has been reported to use some 30 leased aircraft.

European countries have allowed these aircraft to land, refuel and take off from their territory. Under international law and standards, all States must cooperate to bring to an end any serious breach of the prohibition of torture and other peremptory rules of international law. They must also refrain from aiding or assisting those carrying out such breaches.

Amnesty International calls on European countries to investigate promptly and thoroughly allegations that their territory has been used to assist CIA-chartered flights secretly transporting detainees to countries where they may face "disappearance", torture or other ill-treatment. Pending the results of such an investigation, all States must ensure that their territory and facilities are not used to assist rendition flights.

The organization urges all member States of the Council of Europe to provide full cooperation with the investigation carried out by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on allegations about secret detention centres, and provide complete information on their internal law and practices relating to secret rendition flights, as requested by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Rendition and 'disappearances' in the 'war on terror'

Council of Europe report: European countries must do more to prevent rendition flights

Gulfstream III: N829MG (Later re-registered as N259SK) is one six planes used by the CIA for renditions. This plane flew Maher Arar from the US to Jordan on 8 October 2002, en route to Syria where he was detained for 12 months and tortured.

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Take action
Stop secret detentions in the "war on terror"

Urgent Appeal Case-Syria/Germany/USA

Amnesty International (AI) welcomes the call from the European Union Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini for European governments to cooperate fully with the Council of Europe's investigation into "extraordinary renditions" and secret detention centres. The Council of Europe's interim report, published today, made clear that the response from some European countries has not been sufficient.

The governments of both the UK and Romania, for example, have cited their confidence in assurances offered by the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. AI believes that such assurances cannot be regarded as adequate protection against abuse.

AI reiterates its call to the UK Government to launch an immediate, thorough and independent investigation into evidence that its territory has been used to assist in unlawfully transporting detainees to countries where they risk torture. The Polish authorities must make the findings of their enquiry into the alleged existence of secret CIA detention centres available to the Council of Europe. The authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina must provide more information about how six Bosnians came to be abducted by American agents on Bosnian soil and taken to Guantánamo Bay.

The report also casts doubt on the Italian Government's denial that it was informed about the operation in which at least 25 foreign agents abducted an Egyptian citizen in the middle of Milan. The Italian authorities clearly have more explaining to do.

As Dick Marty points out in the report, "the fact that detention and interrogation centres have been relocated to other countries is proof that the authorities are fully aware that the methods used are incompatible with the American legal system." Amnesty International strongly endorses his call that Europe must "clearly and unambiguously declare that it refuses outright to tolerate such doings in its territory, or anywhere else."

AI believes that European countries must do everything in their power to ensure that no further renditions flights take place. Given the serious allegations that have been raised by both AI in the past and Mr Marty today, European governments must ask more detailed questions about the purposes of all such flights and about the identity and status of all passengers on board.

AI has analysed the movements of 17 aircraft that have been identified with specific cases of rendition or with companies alleged to be supporting the logistics of the program. Mr Marty has identified 14 additional aircraft allegedly belonging to entities with direct or indirect links to the CIA and believed to have been used by the CIA to transport detainees.

While the majority of these flights are unconnected with renditions, there is no secure mechanism by which European governments can guarantee that their airports and airspace are not being used to support and facilitate the multiple human rights violations encompassed by renditions, which often involve abduction, arbitrary arrest and unlawful transfer. States have an absolute obligation not to transfer anyone to a country where they face a significant risk of torture.

AI therefore recommends that, pending the outcome of the Council of Europe's investigations, the operators of all 31 planes identified by Mr Marty should be forced to provide detailed information every time they land at an airport in Europe or enter European airspace. This would include, at minimum, the full flight plan of the aircraft, including onward stops from Europe and full itinerary since leaving the US, and the full names and nationalities of all passengers on board, and the purposes of their travel. If any passengers are listed as prisoners or detainees, more detailed information would have to be provided. European governments should refuse access to airspace and airfields if such information is not forthcoming.

Background information

During the four years between September 2001 and September 2005, the 17 airplanes analysed by AI recorded 2,238 movements in 270 airports in 62 countries and territories, including more than 800 flights in and out of Europe and the CIS. Such planes have landed in Azerbaijan, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Republic of Ireland, Italy, Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.

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UK: CIA rendition flights used UK airfields

Amnesty International today published the details of CIA flights that used UK airfields to refuel just hours after transferring detainees to countries where they risked torture.

The information concerns two flights in late 2001 and one in early 2002, where planes that had taken detainees to Jordan and Egypt, landed immediately afterwards at Prestwick airport in Glasgow for refuelling before heading back to the United States.

On Monday 12th December UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw stated that since US President George W Bush took office in January 2001, the UK government has found no evidence of a request from the United States "for overflights or for refuelling or other facilitation for what you've described as rendition....nor are we aware by other means of any such case."

"The UK government cannot distance itself so easily from a policy based on kidnap and unlawful transfer. In 2002 UK agents were implicated in the rendition of two UK residents from Gambia to Afghanistan to Guantánamo Bay. Whether the US is sending people to other countries to be tortured, or snatching them in other countries to be abused in Guantanamo, international law prohibits the UK, or any other state, from aiding or abetting them," said Claudio Cordone, Amnesty International's Senior Director of Regional Programmes.

Amnesty International's information concerns a Gulfstream V turbojet, then registered as N379P, which between 2001 and 2005 made at least 78 stopovers at UK airports while en route to or from destinations such as Baku, Dubai, Cyprus, Karachi, Qatar, Riyadh, Tashkent, and Warsaw.

Records show that three of these flights were directly connected to known cases of rendition:

On 23 October 2001, witnesses saw Jamil Qasim Saeed Mohammed being bundled on board a Gulfstream V, registration N379P, by a group of masked men at Karachi airport in Pakistan. The plane flew Jamil Qasim Saeed Mohammed to Jordan. The following day, the Gulfstream flew to Glasgow Prestwick to refuel, then back to Dulles International near Washington DC. Amnesty International has repeatedly requested information from the US authorities about the current whereabouts and legal status of Jamil Qasim Saeed Mohammed, but has received no reply.

On 18/19 December 2001, according to an inquiry conducted by the Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsmen, the Gulfstream V took Ahmed Agiza and Mohammed al-Zari from Sweden to Cairo. Amnesty International's records show that the plane had made several trips between Cairo and Prestwick earlier in the month, and stopped to refuel at Prestwick after leaving the two detainees in Cairo, where they were reportedly tortured. In March 2005, the Chief Parliamentary Ombudsman in Sweden, having reviewed the Swedish government's role in the transfer to Egypt of the two

detainees, concluded that the "the Swedish Security Police lost control of the situation at the airport and during the transport to Egypt. The American security personnel took charge... Such total surrender of power to exercise public authority on Swedish territory is clearly contrary to Swedish law."

On 12 January 2002, according to Indonesian security officials, the Gulfstream V, N379P, took Muhammad Saad Iqbal Madni from Jakarta to Cairo. Amnesty International records confirm previous media reports that when the plane left Cairo, it flew to Prestwick to refuel. Iqbal Madni has since been returned to US custody, and is currently being held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He does not have a lawyer, and other detainees have said in the last month that he is in poor condition and "at risk of losing his mind".

"The UK has allowed these aircraft to land, refuel and take off from their territory. Instead of ducking its responsibilities, the UK Government must launch an immediate, thorough and independent investigation into mounting evidence that its territory has been used to assist in unlawfully transporting detainees to countries where they may face "disappearance", torture or other ill-treatment," said Claudio Cordone.

Pending the results of such an investigation, the UK should ensure that its territory and facilities are not used to assist rendition flights. Amnesty International also urges the UK to provide full cooperation with the investigations to be carried out by the European Parliament and by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on allegations about secret detention centres, and to provide complete information on their internal law and practices relating to secret rendition flights, as requested by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Amnesty International is campaigning to stop torture and other ill-treatment in the "war on terror". For more information, please go to the campaign home page: <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/stoptorture-index-eng>