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New research finds that 76% of Irish people think that planes linked to rendition should be checked.



N313P plane used in rendition flights. Later registered as N4476S. © Toni Marimon

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Amnesty International has consistently highlighted its concern over the use of torture on detainees held in secret detention centres without any legal process. We have also consistently flagged our concerns over the possible use of Ireland as a staging post in that process. Research recently carried out on behalf of the organization shows clearly that 76% of the Irish public share those concerns.

"This is clear evidence, if evidence were needed, that the people of Ireland want our Government, our airports, and our airspace, to have no hand, act or part in the hideous practice of extraordinary renditions," said Sean Love.

Amnesty International (Ireland) commissioned Lansdowne Market Research to conduct research on the issue of "extraordinary renditions" through Shannon. The research was undertaken on a nationwide basis, sampling of 1,000 people, between March 7-21 2006.

The question posed was:

"It is alleged that CIA flights currently using Shannon airport may be illegally transferring abducted suspects to Guantánamo, Iraq, and other secret locations, where they may face the risk of torture and/or death. Do you think that the Irish Government should be checking each of these flights to see if this is actually happening?"

Yes - 76%

No - 14%

Don't Know - 10%

Renditions involve multiple human rights violations and thrive on secrecy. Most victims have been detained illegally or abducted in the first place, and subsequently transferred to countries where torture is permitted. Many of those illegally detained in one country and illegally transported to another have subsequently "disappeared", including in US custody. Their whereabouts remain undisclosed.

Every one of the victims of rendition interviewed by Amnesty has said they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated. On Friday the United Nations' Special Investigator on Torture, Manfred Nowak, said he was certain that there are secret US prisons in Europe and he wants access to them. He said he had proof that secret US prisons continue to operate in Europe. "I am 100 percent sure. I have evidence of torture".

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dermot Ahern, made a definitive and welcome statement in the Dáil on 14 December 2005 that "the Government has not and

will not permit any flight engaged in extraordinary rendition to pass through an Irish airport or through Irish or Irish-controlled airspace”.

“Amnesty International now demands that the Irish Government make this commitment meaningful in the context of CIA flights through Shannon airport and Irish airspace,” said Seán Love, Executive Director of Amnesty International Irish Section in Dublin today.

The USA acknowledges its use of renditions but says they are carried out in accordance with US law and its obligations under international law. The US and its allies have repeatedly denied allegations of torture or what has been described as the subcontracting of torture.

Amnesty International has records of nearly 1,000 flights directly linked to the CIA, most of which have used European airspace. We brought to the Irish Government’s attention in December flight logs showing that six planes known to be used by the CIA for renditions had made at least 50 landings at Shannon airport.

The Chicago Convention makes clear that every state has the right to require that an aircraft flying over its territory must land at a designated airport for inspection if there are “reasonable grounds to conclude that it is being used for any purpose inconsistent with the aims of the convention”. The extensive reporting by the media, human rights organisations and parliamentary bodies with specific information on renditions constitutes “reasonable grounds” for suspicion – and therefore gives countries the right and duty to stop any aircraft suspected of involvement in renditions.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe (CoE), who is currently investigating renditions across Europe, highlighted in March 2006 that controls exercised by the Irish authorities over foreign aircraft do not provide adequate safeguards against abuse. He also confirmed that mere assurances that the activities of foreign agents comply with international and national law are not enough - effective guarantees are required, with mechanisms to enforce, if necessary, human rights law.

The Venice Commission, legal advisers to the CoE, has said that CoE states must inspect aircraft landing in their jurisdictions if there are "serious reasons" to believe that prisoners bound for torture elsewhere are on board. The Commission also stated that these states must act to protect prisoners from torture even if they are being carried on board flights that cross their airspace but do not land. Without a transparent process, based on the international law and standards that bind all states, the programme of rendition and secret detention is eroding the very human security and rule of law it claims to protect. The USA has, in effect, created a law-free zone in which the human rights of certain individuals are erased.

“There is nothing anti-American about a sovereign state taking its own obligations under international law seriously. The views expressed by the Irish public on the possible abuse of Ireland’s territory and airspace for the illegal activity of extraordinary rendition are very clear. No amount of prevarication by Government can justify evasion of its responsibilities,” said Love.