



Brussels, 22/11/06

## PRESS RELEASE

### Former Guantanamo detainee meets MEPs investigating CIA renditions

When Murat Kurnaz - a German resident of Turkish origin - travelled to Pakistan in late 2001 to "find himself and deepen his faith", he told MEPs on Wednesday, he was arrested by the Pakistani police. "They caught me and sold me to the Americans for 3000 or 5000 dollars," he said. Mr Kurnaz was transferred to a prison in Afghanistan and later flown to Guantanamo, where he remained until August this year when he was released without charge.

Mr Kurnaz is the first person to have been detained in Guantanamo to give evidence directly to Parliament's temporary committee investigating allegations of illegal CIA activity in Europe. His lawyer, Bernhard Docke, said there was no evidence to justify his detention - apparently on suspicion of having sought to fight for the Taliban - and that no official explanations have been given for his release last August, either from the American or the German side. He added that the German authorities had failed to help for years, on the grounds that, although born and raised in Germany, he was a citizen of Turkey. He was, however, finally released after Chancellor Angela Merkel raised his case during a visit to Washington this year.

#### **Did Germany play a role?**

The German authorities have never admitted to playing a role in his arrest, rendition and prolonged detention, although Mr Kurnaz insisted that he was approached by two German soldiers from the KSK (*Kommando Spezialkräfte*, Special Forces Command in Afghanistan) while in detention at a Kandahar prison. "I thought they had questions for me and that maybe they could help me, but they only said: 'you have chosen the wrong side' and mistreated me. They didn't ask me any specific questions, it was not an interrogation." Once in Guantanamo, Mr Kurnaz says he received two more visits by groups of unidentified Germans, in 2002 and 2004. His lawyer believed some of them to be members of the German intelligence service.

Mr Kurnaz was also convinced of some degree of cooperation between Germany and the USA prior to his detention: "Information was passed on. The Americans knew many details of my life in Germany". Mr Docke added that investigations hint at possible contacts and sharing of intelligence at police level, not necessarily at government level.

Hellmut Königshaus, a representative of the Bundestag inquiry committee on CIA renditions set up to investigate the El Masri case, said their inquiry will be extended to look into Mr Kurnaz's case from January 2007, and whether or not the US government offered to free Mr Kurnaz and send him to Germany as early as 2003, which the German government allegedly refused because of the costly surveillance conditions on which the American authorities insisted.

The Turkish authorities also visited Mr Kurnaz in Guantanamo but failed to give him any assistance. "They said during the interview they could not do anything for me, it was up to the Americans to release me or not. They said they were there just to ask questions". Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler (PSE, DE) stressed that this fact is also of particular interest for the committee, whose mandate includes investigating activities of EU candidate countries like Turkey.

#### **Other prisoners**

Asked by MEPs about the situation of other prisoners in Guantanamo, Mr Kurnaz said he had met prisoners captured in Bosnia, Africa and Pakistan. Some of them were EU residents - one person from Britain had been taken prisoner in Africa during a business trip. "The media reports that Guantanamo prisoners are combatants taken from the battle field are not true. Many of us were picked up by police when sleeping and sold to the Americans," he said. He also met one Danish

and two Belgian nationals. "The Danish national was the first allowed to leave. He got constant visits from Denmark, they questioned him a lot and finally released him in 2002 or 2003", he said, and also confirmed that other EU prisoners said they had received been visited in Guantanamo by officials of their country of residence .

### **Flights to Guantanamo**

Finally, asked about his flight from Afghanistan to Guantanamo, Mr Kurnaz said he was blindfolded and tied up, sometimes to a seat and sometimes to the floor of the plane. He confirmed his plane did a stop on the way but was unable to say in which country. Other prisoners had told him their planes made one or more stops or that they had changed planes but could not say where.

Press enquiries:

María Andrés Marín - tel. (32-2) 28 44299

Mobile: +32 (0) 498 98 35 90

e-mail: [libe-press@europarl.eu.int](mailto:libe-press@europarl.eu.int).