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Worldwide protests call for Guantánamo closure on 5th anniversary

On the fifth anniversary of the Guantánamo Bay detention centre, millions of Amnesty International members and supporters are mobilizing around the world in a series of demonstrations and activities calling for the US authorities to close the prison camp once and for all.

As detentions at the US Naval Base move into their sixth year, the organization also called for all detainees to be given a fair trial without further delay or to be released. Demonstrations and other events are being held in cities across the world in more than 20 countries from Washington DC to Tokyo and from Tel Aviv to London, Tunis, Madrid and Asunción.

"No individual can be placed outside the protection of the rule of law, and no government can hold itself above the rule of law. The US government must end this travesty of justice," said Amnesty International's Secretary General Irene Khan.

"Equally, it is not enough for world leaders to express concern about Guantánamo and carry on business as usual with the USA. The international community must actively press the USA to close Guantánamo and restore respect for international law."

"With every passing day, the cruelty of this indefinite detention regime ratchets up another notch," said Ms. Khan. "Guantánamo has come to symbolize the hollowness of the US government's promise that respect for human dignity and the rule of law would lie at the heart of its response to the attacks of 11 September 2001. Torture, humiliation, discrimination, bypassing of the courts and disregard for treaty obligations, with almost total impunity, are all now among the entries in the Guantánamo logbook."

The first of more than 750 detainees of some 45 nationalities who have been taken to the base arrived on 11 January 2002. Detainees have included children as young as 13, people who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, and scores of individuals handed over to the USA from Pakistan or Afghanistan in return for bounties of thousands of dollars.

Five years on, nearly 400 people are held in Guantánamo. None has been tried. None has appeared in court and all are unlawfully held. None of them know for how long they will be there, itself a form of psychological abuse in addition to the physical abuse detainees have been subjected to. By association, their families too are subjected to the cruelty of this virtually incommunicado island incarceration.

The US authorities have branded the detainees as “enemy combatants” in a global conflict. That the world is seen as the “battlefield” is illustrated by the fact that those held in Guantánamo have included individuals picked up in Gambia, Bosnia, Mauritania, Egypt, Indonesia, and Thailand as well as Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The CIA is known to have operated an interrogation facility at Guantánamo, although the agency’s activities remain shrouded in secrecy. Amnesty International has raised allegations with the US authorities that agents of other countries, including China and Libya, have been in the base and participated in ill-treatment.

Some of the detainees have been held in CIA-run secret prisons in other parts of the world before being transported to Guantánamo.

“Guantánamo is a central hub in the web of secret prison sites and renditions which has been spun around the world by the USA with the complicity of other governments including in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa,” Ms Khan said. “It is high time the USA and its partners in crime ended this web of secrecy and abuse.”

“Far from strengthening security, these practices have weakened human rights and the rule of law, which are the best antidote to insecurity, and have undermined the moral authority of the USA to speak on other human rights issues such as Darfur.”

The US government has not only ignored international human rights standards, it has also blocked judicial oversight by its own courts. Last October, President Bush signed into law the Military Commissions Act which strips the US courts of jurisdiction to hear *habeas corpus* appeals from foreign detainees held as “enemy combatants”, including in Guantánamo. *Habeas corpus* is a fundamental safeguard against arbitrary detention and torture. Amnesty International is campaigning for restoration of *habeas corpus* and repeal or substantial amendment of the Military Commissions Act.

Note to editors

For more information regarding Amnesty International's campaign to close Guantánamo, please see: www.amnesty.org/close Guantanamo

To access Amnesty International’s media pack on Guantánamo, please log on to <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/usa-151206-media-eng>

For a selection of Amnesty International events and demonstrations being held to call for the closure of the Guantanamo detention centre, please see: <http://news.amnesty.org/index/ENGAMR510062007>

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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