**“If The Us Tortures, Why Can’t We Do It?” – United Nations Expert Says Moral High Ground Must Be Recovered**

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The United States government’s reluctance to work with international authorities on the issue of accountability for human rights violations has made it easier for other nations to shirk their responsibilities, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan E. Méndez, said today.

Mr. Méndez’s warning comes after the long-awaited release of the findings, conclusions and executive summary of the US Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA interrogations practices, which concludes that US high officials have promoted, encouraged and allowed the use of torture after 9/11.

“I commend the Senate Intelligence Committee for conducting what appears to be a very thorough and frank report, and also for publishing despite pressures against it,” the expert said.  “The former administration aggressively and repeatedly rejected the principles of transparency and accountability and maintains the pattern of denial and defense.”

“The release of this report contributes to fulfilling the obligations of the United States with respect to the truth, and it should generate an honest debate about the institutional and political causes that led the United States to engage in torture after 9/11, including measures to ensure that it will not happen again,” he stated.

The Special Rapporteur stressed that this should be “a first step in the direction of fulfilling other US obligations under Convention against Torture (CAT), namely to combat impunity and ensure accountability, by investigating and prosecuting those responsible.”

“We had a sense of moral condemnation of torture that was truly universal. The nations that tortured denied that they did,” the expert noted. “However, the example set by the United States on the use of torture has been a big draw-back in the fight against such practice in many other countries throughout the world.”

“I travel to parts of the world in my capacity of United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture and I can attest to the fact that many states either implicitly or explicitly tell you:  ‘Why look at us? If the US tortures, why can’t we do it?’” he said. “We have lost a little bit of the moral high ground, but it can be regained and it should be regained.”

Mr. Méndez underscored that, “as a nation that has publicly affirmed its belief that respect for truth advances respect for the rule of law, and as a nation that frequently calls for transparency and accountability in other countries, the United States must rise to meet the standards it has set both for itself and for others.”

“It is also my conviction that lasting security for the United States can only be achieved on the basis of truth and not secrecy,” he said, quoting a recent open letter sent to President Barak Obama by him and other UN independent human rights experts.

“It is the Government’s responsibility to let the US people know what happened during the years when extraordinary rendition, secret detention, and so-called enhanced interrogation techniques were practiced, and to ensure accountability and transparency to the fullest extent possible,” he added.

The serious abuses detailed in the report constitute basic violations of international human rights law. The Senate’s report concludes that US high officials have promoted, encouraged and allowed the use of torture but reveals also that the CIA’s use of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques was ‘not an effective means of acquiring intelligence or gaining cooperation from detainees’ and that the justifications for the use of such methods rested on ‘inaccurate claims of their effectiveness.’

“In the past, I have engaged the US Government on a number of cases referenced in the CIA report and I will carefully study the replies I have received and the facts now revealed in this report,” said the expert.

“There is no doubt that ‘torture programs right after 9/11 have made the matter of terrorism worse’ and the torture that has taken place has been a breeding ground for more terrorism,” the Special Rapporteur concluded.