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28 June 2004

Bush Commemorates U.N. Day to Support Torture Victims U.S. reaffirms commitment to the worldwide elimination of torture

President Bush reaffirmed the United States commitment to ending torture saying that the U.S. "stands against and will not tolerate torture."

The United States will "investigate and prosecute all acts of torture and undertake to prevent other cruel and unusual punishment in all territory under our jurisdiction," Bush said in a June 26 statement honoring the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

Following is the text of the White House statement:

(begin text)

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
(Ankara, Turkey)
June 26, 2004

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

Today, on United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the United States reaffirms its commitment to the worldwide elimination of torture. The non-negotiable demands of human dignity must be protected without reference to race, gender, creed, or nationality. Freedom from torture is an inalienable human right, and we are committed to building a world where human rights are respected and protected by the rule of law.

To help fulfill this commitment, the United States has joined 135 other nations in ratifying the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. America stands against and will not tolerate torture. We will investigate and prosecute all acts of torture and undertake to prevent other cruel and unusual punishment in all territory under our jurisdiction. American personnel are required to comply with all U.S. laws, including the United States Constitution, Federal statutes, including statutes prohibiting torture, and our treaty obligations with respect to the treatment of all detainees.

The United States also remains steadfastly committed to upholding the Geneva Conventions, which have been the bedrock of protection in armed conflict for more

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than 50 years. These Conventions provide important protections designed to reduce human suffering in armed conflict. We expect other nations to treat our service members and civilians in accordance with the Geneva Conventions. Our Armed Forces are committed to complying with them and to holding accountable those in our military who do not.

The American people were horrified by the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. These acts were wrong. They were inconsistent with our policies and our values as a Nation. I have directed a full accounting for the abuse of the Abu Ghraib detainees, and investigations are underway to review detention operations in Iraq and elsewhere.

It is often American men and women in uniform who fight for the freedom of others from tyrannical regimes that routinely use torture to oppress their citizens. From Nazi Germany to Bosnia, and Afghanistan to Iraq, American service members have fought to remove brutal leaders who torture and massacre. It is the American people and their contributions that have helped to rebuild these traumatized nations to give former victims hope.

A little over a year ago, American service members and our coalition partners freed the Iraqi people from a dictatorship that routinely tortured and executed innocent citizens because of what they believed in or what ethnic or religious group they came from. In torture chambers, innocent Iraqis were brutalized and the bodies of the dead left in mass graves. Throughout the past year, Americans have assisted the Iraqi people in establishing institutions to ensure accountability so that such acts do not occur again and to help victims recover.

Despite international efforts to protect human rights around the world, repressive regimes continue to victimize people through torture. The victims often feel forgotten, but we will not forget them. America supports accountability and treatment centers for torture victims. We contribute to the U.N. Fund for the Victims of Torture and support the work of non-governmental organizations to end torture and assist the victims. We also provide protection, counseling, and where necessary and possible, relocation in the United States. We stand with the victims to seek their healing and recovery, and urge all nations to join us in these efforts to restore the dignity of every person affected by torture.

These times of increasing terror challenge the world. Terror organizations challenge our comfort and our principles. The United States will continue to take seriously the need to question terrorists who have information that can save lives. But we will not compromise the rule of law or the values and principles that make us strong. Torture is wrong no matter where it occurs, and the United States will continue to lead the fight to eliminate it everywhere.

(end text)

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