

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release, 4th December 2005

MPs and Peers from all parties come together to demand that the government comes clean over 'torture flights'

In an unusual show of cross-party unity, MPs and Peers from all parties have created an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Extraordinary Rendition, Chaired by Andrew Tyrie MP. They are meeting on Monday [5th December] to demand that the government comes clean over its role in alleged 'torture flights'.

APPG Chairmain, Andrew Tyrie MP (Chichester) explained the fundamental issue:

"The heart of the matter is that we appear to be witnessing a sharp change in the way the US runs its foreign policy. Torture is morally repugnant and cannot be justified. By apparently assisting the US in the practice of extraordinary rendition, the UK and the West are losing the moral high ground that has been so valuable to foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. We seem to be flouting the very values that we are trying to export.

By appearing to condone such activities we risk losing the support of moderate Muslims, at home and abroad. That makes terrorism more likely. And it is why condoning torture makes Britain less secure, not more."

Mr Tyrie then explained why he set up the APPG:

"For a year, I have been writing letters and asking questions about a shocking development in the campaign against terrorism: the apparent practice of passing detainees suspected of terrorism to countries where they may be tortured. The answers given by the government have been vague and uninformative.

The Foreign Affairs Select Committee, who tried to investigate this matter earlier in the year, accused the government of having a 'policy of obfuscation'ⁱ, by not answering their questions 'with the transparency and accountability required on so serious an issue'.ⁱⁱ

I decided to set up this All Party Parliamentary Group in order to bring greater awareness, both in Parliament and in the country, to this practice. I also wanted to make it clear that this is a matter of grave concern to MPs and Peers from all parties: we are not prepared to put up with vacuous replies"

At the first meeting of the APPG, Parliamentarians will hear presentations from Professor James Crawford SC, one of the leading international lawyers in this field, and Stephen Grey, an investigative

journalist with considerable knowledge of extraordinary rendition. Parliamentarians will then discuss their plans for taking the matter forward.

Andrew Tyrie explained:

'The purpose of the meeting is to shed light on two things: first, what we know about these flights and what we still need to find out. Second, we need to know the legal issues that are raised if the UK is involved in this practice.'

*I will distribute a briefing paper which has been specially prepared by the renowned Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice, at New York University School of Law. They conclude that 'seemingly innocuous acts (e.g. allowing refuelling at airports of aircraft of another State) can become wrongful under international law if those acts facilitate Extraordinary Rendition.'*ⁱⁱⁱ

Mr Tyrie concluded:

"We want to see a sea change in the way that the Government approaches this issue. We want full disclosure from the government about the information it possesses about these flights: What questions or demands has it made to the US? Has the government received information which has been extracted under torture? What steps is it going to take to ensure that UK airports and bases are not used to assist in the practice of Extraordinary rendition."

Ends.

Andrew Tyrie can be contacted on 0207 219 6371. His office email is marsha@parliament.uk. The Specialist Adviser to the APPG is Mark Pallis. He can be reached on 07891 205 962. His email is markpallis@yahoo.co.uk.

Notes:

As currently understood, the term 'Extraordinary Rendition' refers to the practice of transferring an individual to a foreign state in circumstances that make it more likely than not that the individual will be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

It has been alleged that the United States has carried out extraordinary renditions on many occasions, with US agents seeking to fly suspects to location where it is known that they may be tortured, hoping to gain useful information from the use of abusive interrogation techniques. They have been accused of appearing to turn a blind eye to torture.

In turn, it has been alleged that the UK has provided logistical support to US flights as they transport individuals to and from the third countries, such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria. In addition, the UK has been accused of using information that has been gained as a result of such extraordinary renditions and torture.

The APPG will:

- Organise meetings in the Houses of Parliament. We aim to arrange one major meeting per Parliamentary term.
 - The first meeting is on the 5th December 2005. Members of Parliament will be addressed by Professor James Crawford SC, the world's most eminent authority on

international law relating to the responsibility of states. He will discuss the legal consequences which Extraordinary Rendition raises for the UK. The second speaker is the investigative journalist and author Stephen Grey, who has been investigating Extraordinary Rendition for several years. There will also be opportunity for discussion.

- The second meeting will probably take place in January and will be a critical examination of the manner in which the UK has responded to allegations that it has been complicit in the practice of Extraordinary Rendition. The meeting will then make recommendations as to how the situation should improve.
- It is hoped to arrange the third meeting with a senior US Congressman or Senator. Many have expressed concern about Extraordinary Rendition.
- Set up a website. This will be the focal point for all information on extraordinary rendition. To date, there is no such site and a UK Parliament APPG is best placed to provide trusted, authoritative information and analysis. In particular, the website will bring together all relevant Parliamentary Questions and debates – this will prove an invaluable resource for all those following the UK's response to Extraordinary Rendition.
- Write briefings and reports. These will be disseminated by email to Parliamentarians and published on the website.
 - The first briefing has been prepared by the Centre for Human Rights and Global Justice at New York University. It provides a summary of alleged examples of rendition and an overview of the legal issues raised by the practice.
 - The second briefing will be prepared for the meeting in January. It will discuss the adequacy of the UK response to allegations that it has been complicit in the practice of Extraordinary Rendition. This briefing will be discussed at the January meeting, and if the APPG so decides, it may be adopted as a report of the APPG and published along with the APPG's recommendations.
 - A third report may draw together and summarise the responses taken by the EU, US and other countries to allegations of Extraordinary Rendition.

ⁱ Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 6th Report, 2004-2005, Foreign Policy Aspects of the War Against Terrorism, para 14.

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ⁱⁱⁱ APPG Briefing paper No 1. To be published at the meeting.