

U.S. Interrogates Inmates in Secret Yemen Prisons



Washington, June 23 (RHC)-- U.S. forces have been involved in the interrogation of detainees in a secret network of prisons in Yemen. A report by Associated Press says hundreds of people arrested in the hunt for al-Qaeda militants have been housed in the jails, where torture and abuse are said to be widespread.

Senior U.S. defense officials have acknowledged that their forces have been involved in the interrogations. But they denied taking part in or knowing about human rights abuses.

"We always adhere to the highest standards of personal and professional conduct," chief Defense Department spokeswoman Dana White told AP. "We would not turn a blind eye, because we are obligated to report any violation of human rights."

AP says it has documented at least 18 secret jails across southern Yemen run by the United Arab Emirates or Yemeni forces. Lawyers and families say nearly 2,000 men have disappeared inside the clandestine prisons.

Former inmates released from one detention facility at Riyan airport in the southern city of Mukalla said they were beaten, sexually assaulted, and trussed up on the "grill," in which the victim is tied to a spit like a roast and spun in a circle of fire.

"The entire place is gripped by fear. Almost everyone is sick, the rest are near death. Anyone who complains heads directly to the torture chamber," a former detainee told AP.

The UAE's government has denied the allegations. In a statement it said "There are no secret detention centers and no torture of prisoners is done during interrogations."

The Gulf State is a key member of a Saudi-led military coalition that entered Yemen's conflict in 2015 to fight on the government's side against Houthi rebels. It is also helping the U.S. to target al-Qaeda's local branch and Islamic State group militants.

A law professor at New York University Ryan Goodman told AP that obtaining intelligence that may have been extracted by torture inflicted by another party would still be considered a violation of the International Convention Against Torture and even could qualify as a war crime.

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