

N.C. a link in torture chain

Private air service based in state flies captives to CIA secret prisons

From Barbara Zelter of the N.C. Council of Churches in Raleigh:

President Bush admitted last week that we indeed have a secret offshore CIA detention system for suspects in the "war on terror." In a rousing Sept. 6 speech to show we are capturing the culprits, Bush lifted the veil on what many have decried as a way to export torture.

The administration's denial of the use of torture while flying suspects to secret prisons overseas is a story too long buried. Concerned groups have named a North Carolina link to the gimmick known as "extraordinary rendition." A Johnston County airport and Eastern North Carolina's Global TransPark are known to be part of the "torture taxi" system that flies suspects to black-hole prisons far away.

From the Johnston County airport in Smithfield and Global TransPark in Kinston, Aero Contractors has operated as a CIA front. Evidence exists that Aero flights have taken suspects to CIA-run hideaways, where the president now admits such techniques as waterboarding were used to extract confessions. Waterboarding, or pretending to drown a person, is one of the classic torture techniques that the president now says we won't use in our official Department of Defense prisons, like Guantanamo.

Several N.C. organizations have been asking Gov. Mike Easley, the N.C. General Assembly and Global TransPark leaders to have the state SBI examine the Aero situation. Evidence gathered by the N.C. chapters of Code Pink, Peace Action and Stop Torture Now reveals that our tax dollars are being used to provide sites where state and national laws and the Geneva Convention are being broken, through CIA flights from our soil. An Aug. 26 investigation of the facts is at www.consortiumnews.com/2006/082506a.html.

The N.C. Council of Churches has a formal policy statement against the use of torture by our country for any reason. We have become convinced that we must help uncover and stop any N.C. part in delivering human beings for torture.

On Sept. 1 we sent a letter to legislators, the governor and Global TransPark backing the peace groups' request for an SBI investigation into the Aero secret flights. We called on the leaders to: meet with the groups that have requested action by the N.C. SBI, attorney general and office of the governor; investigate the actions of Aero Contractors and the involvement of Global TransPark as regards extraordinary rendition; and end our state's involvement with the system of torture that violates all sense of morality and human rights.

Torture is an unreliable and ineffective tool for extracting solid information. We don't need it. And we harm innocents in using it. Khaled El-Masri is a case in point. A German citizen, he was snatched while on vacation in Macedonia and detained from Dec. 31, 2003, through May 28, 2004, in Macedonia and Afghanistan, where he was in the CIA prison known as the "Salt Pit." An Aero flight out of our state took him there. He was tortured, found to have no information, then dumped in Albania, 40 pounds thinner and a broken man. An innocent man.

We believe the people of North Carolina want no part of this travesty, no matter what our opinions about war and terrorism. As someone said, "If they were dealing drugs out of Global TransPark and Smithfield airports, we'd be on them in a minute. Torture taxis are against the law, too. Let's stop this mess."

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