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From WorldCantWait.org | Original Article

Many people in this country are aware of the atrocious conditions and treatment of adult prisoners in the U.S. war of terror. These prisoners have been held at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Bagram, and other hellholes run by the U.S. But few are aware that thousands of children have also been taken by the U.S. and its allies in this war of terror.

A few of these children have been held at Guantanamo and have received some publicity, but most have been held in prisons in Iraq and Afghanistan and have received very little notice from U.S. media. What has and is happening to these children victims of the U.S. war?

As late as May 2008 U.S. authorities reported to the U.N. that they were holding at least 513 Iraqi children in U.S.-run prisons as “imperative threats to security.” The U.S. did not report how many children had been previously transferred by U.S. authorities to prisons run by Iraqi puppet forces. Most of the children were held in the same hellhole prisons that held adult prisoners.

In April 2008 the U.S. government reported “approximately 10 juveniles being held at Bagram Theater Internment Facility as unlawful enemy combatants. Bagram has been compared to Gitmo in the crimes committed there by U.S. authorities.

The U.S. came under intense international criticism for its treatment of children when these numbers were released. As a result the U.S. government recently released a report claiming that as of December 2009 only five children were held by the U.S. in U.S. military detention in Iraq and Afghanistan. The report did not say what happened to the other children. It is unknown whether these numbers are true or not, but even if they are, the report leaves unanswered the question of whether these children have access to the protections guaranteed to them under international law. It also fails to address the rights of children transferred by the U.S. to Iraqi and Afghan authorities.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) expressed concerns on January 28th about the U.S. government report. It is likely that most of the reduction may be attributed to the transfer of prisoners to Iraqi authorities. It is well known that the Iraqi puppet forces run hellhole prisons sometimes even worse than those of the U.S. The ACLU asked for data on the fates of the detainees and sought assurance that all current or former child soldiers and juvenile prisoners are being given their rights afforded under international law.

Jamil Dakwar, Director of the ACLU Human Rights Program stated, "...the public is entitled to know how these cases are being handled. We hope that the U.S. can confirm how many of these detainees were released and how many were transferred to Iraqi or Afghan authorities for prosecution. The U.S. has a responsibility to ensure that any juvenile detainees transferred to other authorities are still granted their basic human rights, including consideration of their status as juveniles and safe opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration into society."

The U.S. report did not include information about the treatment and care for those who were under 18 at the time of their capture and who are still in U.S. custody. Also current U.S. military policy allows the U.S. to take up to two weeks to provide the International Red Cross with names and access to all detainees, which is too long for the needs of children in custody. The first weeks of detention are critical to juvenile prisoners, and they should be accounted for and attended to as soon as possible. Much of the abuse that prisoners experience often takes place shortly after capture.

"The humane treatment of juveniles in U.S. military custody is critical to restoring the rule of law and humanity to U.S. detention operations overseas," said Jennifer Turner, human rights researcher with the ACLU Human Rights Program. "...the government still lacks a comprehensive policy regarding the treatment of juveniles still in detention and their access to education, legal services and physical and psychological services that are critical to their rehabilitation."

In November 2009, the ACLU sought updated data from the Department of Defense on juveniles in U.S. military custody in Iraq and Afghanistan and information on efforts to bring U.S. policy regarding the treatment, detention and trial of juveniles into compliance with international law. As of today no response has been received from the Pentagon.

Why is the Obama administration not releasing this information to the ACLU and the public? What is being hidden? It is not enough to reduce the number of juveniles held in the U.S. war of

terror just by transferring them to Iraqi or Afghan puppet forces. What are the conditions of incarceration? Are these children still being deprived of their legal and human rights? What crimes are being committed in our names? These are all questions that deserve an answer. Those responsible for the abuse of these children must be held accountable. This includes not only those responsible during the years of the Bush regime, but also those within the Obama administration who have failed to end the abuse of these children. Transferring them to other abusers in U.S. puppet governments does not excuse the U.S. role or end the abuse.

These children victims of the U.S. war of terror have been silenced through their incarceration and treatment. We, and that means you too, must speak out for them and demand justice now!