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United States Mission to the OSCE

**Statement on International
Humanitarian Law and Respect for
Human Rights**

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 13, 2004

Mr. Chairman,

Everyone around this table is aware that there have been revelations of abuse and humiliation of Iraqi detainees in American custody in Iraq.

We have all seen the pictures in the media. They are shocking and shameful. The acts they depict are despicable and disgusting. President Bush has acknowledged that they are a stain on our country's honor and reputation, and are an offense to the American people. As the President said to Arabic media "Our citizens in America are appalled by what they saw, just like people in the Middle East are appalled."

As a participating State of the OSCE and a state party to multiple treaties dealing with the humane treatment of people in custody, the United States is working to fulfill its obligations to bring the perpetrators of the abuse to justice and to take steps to ensure that such acts do not occur again.

I should like to inform this Council of how the United States Government has so far responded:

First, senior U.S. officials, including the President of the United States, have made it clear that these acts were abhorrent and unacceptable. Both the President and the Secretary of Defense have committed to the vigorous investigation and transparent pursuit of the facts to determine the full extent of these abuses.

Secondly, we have taken steps to ensure that those responsible will be brought to justice.

The U.S. Government has already charged seven military personnel with criminal offenses, has officially reprimanded several others, and has relieved two officers of command. Several investigations are still open.

All allegations of mistreatment will be investigated.

Fair judicial processes will determine who is guilty through transparent and fair procedures.

Those convicted of these abuses will be punished in accordance with the rule of law.

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Third, the U.S. Secretary of Defense has announced that the United States is beginning to work on the issue of compensation for the victims of the abuse.

Fourth, the United States is acting with dispatch to ensure that these abuses are not repeated. All prison operations in Iraq will be thoroughly reviewed. Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, the Deputy Director of Coalition Operations in Iraq, has also outlined additional steps, including an internal review to ensure command structures accurately report events up and down the chain of command, and to ensure the prison guards receive proper training.

Major General Geoffrey Miller has been appointed as the new commander of detainee operations in Iraq. He is speaking openly to the public and has brought the press into the Abu Ghraib prison.

Mr. Chairman, President Bush has apologized to those who were abused, and to their families. Americans believe in the worth and rights and dignity of every person.

The U.S. military is a values-based organization committed to respecting the international law of armed conflict. The great majority of U.S. service members conduct themselves in strict accordance with this body of law, as they are trained to do, and they represent themselves and the United States honorably.

As President Bush has said, one of the key differences between democracies and dictatorships "is that free countries confront such abuses openly and directly." Sadly, no country is immune from abuses, but in a democracy, those who abuse power are brought to justice. Far from trying to hide these abuses, the United States has confronted them in full public view, as democracy demands.

The United States is committed to promoting and protecting human rights -- including those of individuals detained in Iraq.

We take our OSCE commitments seriously and we will continue to keep the Permanent Council apprised of the situation as investigations proceed.

Thank you.

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