

## Be wary of hosting US torture camps

Contributed by Off the Desk  
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RENEWED concerns by the United Nations Human Rights Council that the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was planning to relocate its secret prisons to some African countries ought to put our authorities on alert. Evidence made available by the UN suggests that lack of oversight, political and legal accountability has facilitated illegal activities by intelligence agencies leading to several violations of sharing of signal intelligence and the right to privacy, torture and other inhuman treatment.

Interests shown by the US government in Etosha National Park in the wake of the controversial US state sponsored Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) should not be taken lightly.

The American Government has injected US\$305 million into Namibia through the MCA but critics fear that with the strings attached to the funding, Namibia would compromise its sovereignty and undermine domestic political institutions. The US government's handouts should not be taken lightly considering recent revelations that the US is expanding its secret detention centres for terror suspects to Mauritania, Ethiopia, some countries in North Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Revelations about the "black sites" cited countries such as Iraq where there is a risk of torture which caused international outrage during former president George W. Bush's tenure.

Martin Scheinin, the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms said while the measures were meant to counter terrorism, he was worried by the increasing use of State secrecy provisions and public interest immunities.

The secrecy provisions and immunities involve the US's concealment of illegal acts from oversight bodies or judicial authorities in order to protect themselves from criticism, embarrassment and most importantly – liability. According to Scheinin, intelligence co-operation must be clearly governed by the law (including human rights safeguards) and by transparent regulations authorised according to strict routines controlled and supervised by parliamentary or expert bodies.

The executives should also have powers provided for by law over intelligence agencies and adequate information in order to effectively exercise control.

Scheinin urged all country authorities that participate in alleged extraordinary renditions, torture, disappearances, secret detentions or any other serious human rights violations to investigate fully any wrong-full acts committed by intelligence agencies on their territory.

The US ought to ensure that victims of such unlawful acts are rehabilitated and compensated.

It should be clear to the US that it is unlawful to transfer anyone into the custody of agents of another state, or facilitate such transfers unless the transfer is carried out under judicial supervision in-line with international standards.

The CIA's illegal activities, which have led to torture and other inhuman treatment of innocent people, deserve global condemnation in the most possible strongest terms.

Hence, Namibia should take heed of warning signals from the UN report seriously rather than accepting hand outs without scrutiny.