



UN expert: 100 Guantanamo inmates need new homes

By FRANK JORDANS – Nov 20, 2008

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N.'s torture investigator said Thursday that European countries should take in those Guantanamo inmates who cannot be sent home when the U.S.-run prison closes.

U.S. President-elect Barack Obama has said he intends to shut the Guantanamo Bay detention center once he takes office, a move that could see some detainees released and others charged in U.S. courts.

There are now about 250 inmates in the Guantanamo detention center.

U.N. torture expert Manfred Nowak says many of the inmates who would be released would face persecution if they were deported to their home countries. Human rights campaigners have said at least 40-50 inmates would seek asylum in Europe.

"I think there are more," Nowak told reporters in Geneva. "Even if it's more than 100, I think there is a responsibility also of European allies who cooperated closely with the U.S. in the fight against terrorism."

Nowak said several European countries had expressed willingness to take the men in. He declined to identify the countries involved, except to say that Albania and Sweden have already taken in a handful.

Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller said last week that his country would not take any detainees from Guantanamo.

"None of these detainees have anything to do with Denmark," Moeller was quoted as saying on Nov. 14 by Danish news agency Ritzau.

In Vienna, Austrian Foreign Ministry spokesman Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal said all discussions on the issue were "hypothetical" at this point. German Foreign Ministry officials in Berlin refused to comment on the issue.

Last week, Switzerland denied asylum to three current Guantanamo inmates said to be from Libya, Algeria and China. Amnesty International said Thursday it would help the men appeal the decision.

Gitanjali Gutierrez, a lawyer with the Center for Constitutional Rights who traveled to Switzerland to lobby on their behalf, said one of the men, Abdul-Raouf al-Qassim, faces torture if he is returned to Libya.

Nowak, an Austrian law professor who acts as an independent investigator on torture for the Geneva-based U.N. Human Rights Council, said he had held discussions with American and European officials to try to put in place a system for screening inmates who do seek asylum.

Any formal talks would likely have to wait until the new U.S. administration comes into office next year, he said.

"I'm very confident that in the year 2009 the Obama administration, with the active cooperation of European and other governments, and intergovernmental organizations, will solve this."

Associated Press Writers David Rising in Berlin, Jan Olsen in Copenhagen and Veronika Oleksyn in Vienna, Austria, contributed to this report.