

CIA probe must go to highest level-UN rights boss

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GENEVA — The U.S. prosecutor's investigation into alleged criminal CIA interrogation techniques must go right to the top political level, the chief U.N. rights official said on Thursday.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, 67, in a wide-ranging interview with Reuters, urged European and other countries to resettle Guantanamo detainees so that President Barack Obama can close the U.S.-run prison in Cuba by year-end.

She also called for credible investigations into killings of journalists and aid workers in Russia and voiced concern at the fate of detainees arrested in Iran in post-election protests.

The former United Nations war crimes judge, who marks her first year in office next Tuesday, said she has used an "instinctive" blend of quiet diplomacy and public condemnation to highlight violations worldwide.

The U.S. Justice Department named a special prosecutor this week to investigate CIA interrogation techniques used on terrorism suspects after the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States under then-President George W. Bush.

"Whenever people come under the jurisdiction of the United States, the United States has to be seen to be upholding the very high standards that they claim for their own citizens," Pillay told Reuters in her office overlooking Lake Geneva.

ACCOUNTABILITY AT THE TOP

Any torture or death inflicted on suspects held by U.S. authorities in places including Bagram detention centre in Afghanistan should be part of this investigation, she said.

Asked whether it should go beyond establishing the criminal liability of CIA interrogators, Pillay replied: "That is international law on accountability — that you do not stop at the foot soldiers, you go right up to the ultimate authority that is legally responsible."

"And these would include those who devised the policy, those who ordered it," said Pillay, a Tamil from South Africa.

Former U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney, a vocal defender of the Bush administration's security policies, has said intelligence obtained from harsh interrogation techniques had saved lives. [ID:nN25208112]

Pillay said she had pressed Sweden and Switzerland to accept Guantanamo inmates who

cannot return home. “The quicker that European and other countries help President Obama to close Guantanamo, the better for the human rights of the detainees.”

She expected Washington to play a significant role in the U.N. Human Rights Council — where it has taken up a seat for the first time.

But she said she was trying to overcome “regional bloc voting” in the 47-member forum where some states vote together to shield their friends from censure.

The Geneva forum will examine next month a long-awaited report of an investigation into allegations of war crimes committed by both Israel and Hamas militants during Israel’s invasion of the Gaza strip from Dec. 27-Jan. 18.

Richard Goldstone, a former U.N. war crimes prosecutor leading the international inquiry, is to issue the report in coming weeks ahead of the Council’s debate set for Sept. 29.

The Security Council, acting on a report by Pillay’s predecessor Louise Arbour, asked the International Criminal Court to investigate atrocities in Darfur, Sudan, she noted.

“I hope that they would respond similarly if the Goldstone investigation does point to possible war crimes,” she said.

“Apart from prosecution, I believe that these investigative commissions are very important because they do deliver a sense of justice to victims,” Pillay added.

Goldstone’s inquiry was the first U.N. rights inquiry to hold public hearings, allowing victims to testify, including Israelis hit by rockets fired into southern Israel, she said.

“I hope that all this does lead to some sort of reparation and compensation for victims,” Pillay said. (Editing by Jonathan Lynn and Elizabeth Fullerton)

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