

Canada should resume prisoner transfers: Kabul

CAMPBELL CLARK
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VILNIUS — The Afghan government says it has dealt with all of Canada's concerns about detainees kept in their jails, and Canadian troops can resume transfers of prisoners now.

Afghanistan's defence minister, General Abdul Rahim Wardak, said he doesn't think the Canadian Forces have resumed transfers yet, but that they should start again soon because the Afghan government has met all the conditions set by Canadian officials.

"All the necessary actions which were required has been taken by the Afghan government," Gen. Wardak told reporters at a meeting of NATO defence ministers in Vilnius, Lithuania. "So I think they can resume without being worried."

Canadian Defence Minister Peter MacKay raised the issue yesterday in a one-on-one discussion on the edges of the NATO meeting.

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Gen. Wardak said the chief of Afghanistan's intelligence service, the NDS, told him they have detained a prison official at an NDS jail who was accused of beating a prisoner – the “credible allegation” which led Canada to stop transfers last November – and cleaned house at the prison.

"Now, I think the prison is open for everyday inspections by human rights organizations and also Canadian authorities," Gen. Wardak said.

Mr. MacKay only said that an “operational decision” on the resumption of transfers will be made by the military. The Conservative government has insisted such matters are up to the Forces, and repeatedly refused to comment.

Gen. Wardak's statements transfers can resume now come one day after a Federal Court judge dismissed an effort by Amnesty International Canada and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association to block transfers of prisoners to Afghan custody, ruling it was not an issue because the transfers had been suspended.

Madam Justice Anne Mactavish said she had “very real concerns as to the effectiveness of the steps that have been taken thus far to ensure that detainees transferred by the Canadian Forces to the custody of Afghan authorities are not mistreated.”

But she said the concerns are not an issue right now: “It is not clear at this point when, and indeed if, detainee transfers will ever resume,” Judge Mactavish wrote.

Two senior intelligence officials were dispatched to Kandahar this week to oversee detainees transferred to Afghan jails by the Canadian Forces, in response to concerns raised by Canada.

The deputy chairman of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, Ahmad Fahim Hakim, said earlier this week the two officials had already made contact with Canadian officials and had begun preparing daily reports for Afghan President Hamid Karzai on the Kandahar detention centre.

"We hope it will pave the way for transfer of detainees," Mr. Hakim said.

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