

AFGHAN DETAINEES

Foreign Affairs confirms reports of abuse

DANIEL LEBLANC

OCTOBER 30, 2007

OTTAWA -- Canadian inspectors heard reports of abuse from Afghan detainees captured by Canadian troops during 11 unscheduled visits conducted after they gained access to the country's jails last spring, the Canadian Foreign Affairs Department said yesterday.

However, the government said yesterday that reports those detainees were still being tortured was Taliban propaganda.

"We do expect these kind of allegations from the Taliban," House Leader Peter Van Loan said during Question Period. "I would caution the honourable member against taking them as the word of the truth instantly without penetrating beyond them. As he well knows, we now have in place mechanisms to monitor and follow up Canadian-transferred Taliban prisoners."

The government initially offered the same reaction when The Globe and Mail published a number of stories on the treatment of detainees in Afghanistan this year. However, it was later forced to acknowledge that the Red Cross was not reporting back to Canada as former defence minister Gordon O'Connor had repeatedly claimed. Ottawa then signed a beefed-up agreement in May that gave Canadian officials the right to visit Afghan jails without notice.

Print Edition - Section Front

[Enlarge Image](#)

More National Stories

- **A STORY OF SURVIVAL: THREE-YEAR-OLD FOUND ALIVE AFTER PLANE CRASH KILLS TWO**
- McGuinty turns to veterans for top cabinet jobs
- Hippo dies after transfer to Calgary Zoo
- Liberals probe MP's campaign expenses
- The scientific approach to teaching science
- Go to the National section



The Montreal newspaper La Presse reported yesterday that prisoners in Afghanistan's Sarpoza prison were given electric shocks, beaten with bricks, had their fingernails ripped out and were forced to stand up for days without sleeping, even after the agreement came into effect.

La Presse attributed its account to a spokesman for Afghanistan's national human-rights agency and cited an unidentified senior prison official. The newspaper also interviewed three accused Taliban captives.

A spokeswoman for Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier said Canadian officials have heard of allegations of mistreatment since

they obtained "unprecedented private access to detainees" in May.

"Since then, our officials have made 11 unannounced visits to detention facilities and have conducted private interviews with a number of detainees," Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Isabelle Bouchard said. "When allegations of abuse are made, we always follow up immediately."

Ms. Bouchard said she could not provide further details.

The opposition Liberals urged the government yesterday to stop transferring detainees until it obtains assurances the Afghans are respecting the Geneva Conventions.

"If it cannot guarantee that those prisoners are protected, it's got to stop transferring," deputy Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff said.

© Copyright 2007 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

CTVglobemedia

globeandmail.com and The Globe and Mail are divisions of CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc., 444 Front St. W., Toronto, ON Canada M5V 2S9

Phillip Crawley, Publisher