

# Human beings in cages

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The United States claims to be the greatest champion of human rights and human dignity in the world. The US government released a paper on "The National Security Strategy" in September 2002 elaborating among other things America's aspirations for human dignity. It says: "America must stand firmly for the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the absolute power of the state; free speech; freedom of worship; equal justice; respect for women; religious and ethnic tolerance; and respect for private property. These demands can be met in many ways. America's constitution has served us well. Many other nations, with different histories and cultures, facing different circumstances, have successfully incorporated these core principles into their own systems of governance. History has not been kind to those nations which ignored or flouted the rights and aspirations of their people".

In the year, following the terrorist attack on World Trade Center Towers on September 11, 2001, the US government seems to have forgotten "the core principles" of human dignity, equal Justice and religious and ethnic tolerance. Some two months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US forces swooped over Afghanistan letting loose a reign of terror over the Afghan people, carpet bombing the country and indiscriminately killing and arresting hundreds of the so called al-Qaeda suspects. It however, failed to capture or kills its two main targets — Osama bin Laden and Mulla Omer. Ironically, the terrorists who destroyed the World Trade Center, were Arabs, but the US President targeted Afghan civilians with a vengeance.

According to a Human Rights Watch report: "Most of the weapons used in the first days of the Afghanistan conflict have been precision-guided weapons (often called "smart" bombs). Gravity ("dumb") bombs (including cluster bombs) have also been in use. In deciding whether to use precision-guided weapons, states have a duty to take all feasible steps to minimise injury to civilians and civilian objects. This requires commanders to choose the means of attack that will minimise incidental harm to civilians. Where a party to the conflict has



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precision weapons at its disposal, it is under a duty to use "smart" rather than "dumb" bombs in populated areas."

Human Rights Watch has called on the United States and coalition governments to: "Publicity reaffirms your commitment to abide by international humanitarian law standards, particularly as they concern the protection of the civilian population." Publicity provides and evaluates information on civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects. "Regularly examine targeting emphasis and weapons selection during the armed conflict and take whatever corrective measures are needed to minimise the effects on civilians of the use of military force." Establish an independent and impartial body, competent to receive confidential information that would investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian law, and recommend changes to targeting and bombing doctrine to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law.

Now, America is poised to attack Iraq which apparently had no hand in the terrorist attacks on US, but US is convinced that Iraq has stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons and is likely to produce nuclear weapons in the near future. According to a *News Week* report: "A secretary of defence went over to Baghdad as a special envoy in 1983 for President Reagan. His mission was to sell Saddam biological weapons so Iraq could poison Iran, which at that time was America's worst enemy. The secretary persuaded Saddam to buy 2,200 gallons of anthrax spores, which were shipped from Manassas, Va.; 5,300 gallons of deadly botulinum, which could be loaded into warheads; and hundreds of gallons of germs that could be used to make gas gangrene. When Saddam was losing the war against Iran, the US also supplied him with tanks, helicopters and other military equipment."

The anti-Islam and anti Muslim phobia has reached alarming proportions in the

US and the Muslim community, which once considered America a land of opportunity feels harassed and unsafe.

In the most blatant and outrageous violation of human rights, the US is illegally holding at Guantanamo Bay about 625 peoples from 42 countries which were rounded up from Afghanistan and some other places, calling them "enemy combatants" in order to deprive them from their rights as POWs under the Geneva Conventions.

Three Afghan nationals who were released after months of captivity at Guantanamo Bay have reached Kabul. They have told a harrowing tales of being kept in wire cages like animals and denied contact with their families. A fourth man, who is a 60 years old Pakistani has also returned to Pakistan. They were kept in open air cages for months and were allowed to go outside twice a week for only half an hour. What about the "human rights" of these poor people who have been detained without any charges? One American, who was arrested along with the rest of the detainees was tried in a Court of law on specific charges has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment. How was he different from other detainees? Is it because he was a white American, while the rest belong to Muslim Countries. Americans owe to the world an answer to these questions. The American media is absolutely mum on this most flagrant violation of human rights. With all the freedom that the US media enjoys, it has not been allowed to cover the plight of these cage dwellers. And strangely enough it has not protested against this unconstitutional restriction on the coverage of Guantanamo Bay. In fact after September 11, terrorist attacks, the US government aided and abetted by the media has launched a "crusade" against Islam and Muslims under cover of its war against terrorism. Prince Abdullah, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, which is the staunchest ally of the US among Muslim nations, recently said that the western media is targeting not only Saudi Arabia and other Muslim but also Islam as such. One famous TV anchor of America called Islam "the religion of our enemies".

The United States has probably never violated its constitution as much as it is doing under George Bush.