

# Rumsfeld statement on Iraq

WASHINGTON, May 7: Opening statement by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to the Senate Armed Services Committee:

"Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, in recent days there has been a good deal of discussion about who bears responsibility for the terrible activities that took place at Abu Ghraib. These events occurred on my watch. As secretary of defense, I am accountable for them and I take full responsibility.

"It's my obligation to evaluate what happened, to make sure that those who have committed wrongdoing are brought to justice, and to make changes as needed to see that it doesn't happen again.

"I feel terrible about what happened to these Iraqi detainees. They are human beings. They were in US custody. Our country had an obligation to treat them right. We didn't, and that was wrong.

"So to those Iraqis who were mistreated by members of the US armed forces, I offer my deepest apology. It was inconsistent with the values of our nation. It was inconsistent with the teachings of the military, to the men and women of the armed forces. And it was certainly fundamentally un-American.

"Further, I deeply regret the damage that has been done. First to the reputation of the honorable men and women of the armed forces, who are courageously and responsibly and professionally defending our freedoms across the globe.

"Second to the president, the Congress and the American, I wish I had been able to convey to them the gravity of this before we saw it in the media.

"And finally to the reputation of our country.

"The photographic depictions of the US military personnel that the

public has seen have offended and outraged everyone in the Department of Defense. If you could have seen the anguished expressions on the faces of those in our department upon seeing those photos, you would know how we feel today.

"It's important for the American people and the world to know that while these terrible acts were perpetrated by a small number of US military, they were also brought to light by the honorable and responsible actions of other military personnel.

"There are many who did their duty professionally and we should mention that as well. First, Specialist Joseph Darby, who alerted the appropriate authorities that abuses were occurring.

"Having said that, all the facts that may be of interest are not yet in hand. In addition to the Taguba report, there are other investigations under way and we'll be discussing those

today. And because all the facts are not in hand, there will be corrections and clarifications to the record as more information is learned.

"Now let me tell you the measures we're taking to deal with this issue.

"First, to ensure we have a handle on the scope of this catastrophe, I will be announcing today the appointment of several senior former officials who are being asked to examine the pace, the breadth, the thoroughness of the existing investigations and to determine whether additional investigations or studies need to be initiated. They're being asked to report their findings within 45 days of taking up their duties.

"I'm confident that these distinguished individuals will provide a full and fair assessment of what has been done thus far and recommend whether further steps may be necessary.

"Second, we need to review our habits and our procedures.

# prison abuse: text

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"One of the things we've tried to do in the department since September 11 is to try to get the department to adjust our procedures and processes to reflect that we're in a time of war, and that we're in the information age.

"For the past three years we've looked for areas where adjustments were needed, and we've made a great many adjustments. And regrettably we've now found another area where adjustments may be needed.

"Let me be clear: I failed to recognize how important it was to elevate a matter of such gravity to the highest levels, including the president and the members of Congress.

"Third, I'm seeking a way to provide appropriate compensation to those detainees who suffered such grievous and brutal abuse and cruelty at the hands of a few members of the United States armed forces.

"It's the right thing to do.

"I wish we had known more sooner

and been able to tell you more sooner, but we didn't.

"Today we'll have a full discussion of these terrible acts, but first let's take a step back for a moment. Within the constraints imposed on those of us in the chain of command, I have a few additional words.

"First, beyond abuse of prisoners, there are other photos that depict incidents of physical violence toward prisoners, acts that can only be described as blatantly sadistic, cruel and inhuman," the defense chief continued.

"Second, there are many more photographs, and indeed some videos. Congress and the American people and the rest of the world need to know this.

"In addition, the photos give these incidents a vividness, indeed a horror, in the eyes of the world.

"Mr Chairman, I know you join me today in saying to the world, judge us

by our actions, watch how Americans, watch how a democracy deals with the wrongdoing and with scandal and the pain of acknowledging and correcting our own mistakes and our own weaknesses.

"And then, after they have seen America in action, then ask those who teach resentment and hatred of America if our behavior doesn't give a lie to the falsehood and the slander they speak about our people and about our way of life. Ask them if the resolve of Americans in crisis and difficulty, and, yes, in the heartbreak of acknowledging the evil in our midst, doesn't have meaning far beyond their hatred.

"Above all, ask them if the willingness of Americans to acknowledge their own failures before humanity doesn't light the world as surely as the great ideas and beliefs that made this nation a beacon of hope and liberty for all who strive to be free. —AFP