

## Lizin Calls for Closing of Guantanamo

Ms. Lizin testifies before the U.S. Helsinki Commission, seen here with John Bellinger from the U.S. Department of State



U.S. Helsinki Commission

The President of the Belgian Senate and OSCE PA Special Representative on Guantanamo, Anne-Marie Lizin paid her second visit to the American detention facility at Guantanamo on 20 June 2007 at the invitation of the U.S. Government.

In a statement in Washington, DC after the visit, which was a follow-up to the first visit on 3 March 2006, Ms. Lizin called for the closing of the Guantanamo detention facility.

“Guantanamo remains one of the reasons for the anti-American fixation in the world and continues to damage the image of the U.S. abroad, even in friendly countries,” she said at a hearing in the U.S. Congress, “and it must therefore as such be closed.”

Ms. Lizin, who is also the Head of the Belgian Delegation to the OSCE PA and Chairwoman of the Assembly’s General Committee on Human Rights, will present a report to the PA’s Annual Session in Kyiv 5 to 9 July 2007.

The state of prisoners in the Guantanamo facility has long been an area of interest to OSCE parliamentarians, who passed a resolution on the issue in July 2003.

Prior to her visit, Ms. Lizin and her delegation held two days of meetings in Washington, DC with senior representatives from the US State Department and Department of Defence.

At Guantanamo, the delegation members were received and briefed by the Deputy General Commander of the detention facility, visited the camps and cells housing the detainees, and observed some of the operations in the facilities. They also met with intelligence and interrogation staff, were shown some of the evidentiary material gathered from some of the detainees.

On 21 June, the day after the visit to Guantanamo, Ms. Lizin

testified at the U.S. Helsinki Commission’s hearing entitled “Guantanamo: Implications for U.S. Human Rights Leadership.” The hearing was chaired by Congressman Alcee L. Hastings who is also President Emeritus of the OSCE PA. Steny Hoyer, House Majority Leader and Member of the U.S. Delegation to the OSCE PA, stated during the hearing that Guantanamo “is not only a problem but an international disgrace that every day continues to sully this great nation’s good reputation.” Other witnesses included John B. Bellinger III, Legal Adviser from the Department of State, Tom Malinowski, Human Rights Watch, and Gabor Rona, Human Rights First.

In a positive development, the number of detainees at Guantanamo has significantly decreased since Ms. Lizin’s first visit. U.S. government officials confirmed to Ms. Lizin the wish to transfer the majority of the detainees as soon as possible and to bring the most dangerous detainees before Military Commissions.

In order to accelerate the detainee transfers to third countries, notably OSCE participating States, Ms. Lizin has addressed letters to most of these countries.

“I have received very few answers and they were not very positive,” she said. “Nevertheless, I will continue to explore potential possibilities in order to find solutions that could be acceptable for all parties. It might be desirable to involve some international organizations in the process.”

Other members of Ms. Lizin’s delegation were two experts from Belgium, Simon Petermann and Guy Rapaille, as well as Gustavo Pallares, Adviser in the International Secretariat of the OSCE PA, and Françoise Themelin, Secretary of the Belgian Delegation to the OSCE PA in the Senate of Belgium.