

EU urges U.S. to follow law on detainees

By CONSTANT BRAND, Associated Press Writer *Fri Sep 15, 1:05 PM ET*

BRUSSELS, Belgium - The

European Union on Friday called on the United States to respect international law in its handling of terror suspects after **President Bush** acknowledged his country had operated secret prisons abroad.

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"We reiterate that in combatting terrorism, human rights and human standards have to be maintained," said Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja, speaking on behalf of the 25 EU foreign ministers. "We acknowledge the intention of the U.S. administration to treat all detainees in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention."

Tuomioja's statement was the first formal joint reaction by the 25-nation bloc to Bush's disclosure last week that the

CIA had operated controversial detention centers, some of which were believed by human rights groups to have been located in eastern Europe.

The EU appeal for Washington not to ignore international treaties on prisoners of war came as Bush is pushing Congress to back new rules for interrogating and prosecuting terrorism suspects.

Bush's measure would allow classified evidence to be withheld from defendants in terror trials and the use of coerced testimony.

The plan also revises an existing U.S. law that interprets American obligations under the Geneva Conventions — the international treaty that sets the standard for treatment of war prisoners — so that harsh interrogations of detainees would not be questioned in court.

"If not for this program, our intelligence community believes al-Qaida and its allies would have succeeded in launching another attack against the American homeland," Bush said Friday at a news conference in Washington.

The Supreme Court earlier this year struck down Bush's current arrangement for trying detainees held at the U.S. Naval Base Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Bush's acknowledgment last week also increased pressure on European governments to come clean on whether they were cooperating with the U.S. or knew that the CIA was using airports in Europe to transfer detainees.

"The existence of secret detention facilities where detained persons are kept in a legal vacuum is not in conformity with international humanitarian law and international criminal law," Tuomioja said Friday.

Tuomioja did not clarify whether any of the 25 EU member states were involved in running CIA secret prisons. He said only that the EU was committed to combatting terrorism "using all legal means and instruments available."

On Thursday, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos told a European Parliament committee investigating the CIA secret flights and prisons that

Madrid had not participated.

He said Spanish authorities had not found any evidence or indication that detainees had been tortured or illegally interrogated at secret locations in Spain.

Romania and Poland were singled out as possible locations of clandestine CIA jails by Human Rights Watch, but both countries have repeatedly denied involvement.

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