



Tom Lantos

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

RANKING DEMOCRATIC MEMBER

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Lantos Statement on Iraqi Prisoner Abuse Scandal

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA), the ranking member of the House International Relations Committee and co-chair of the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, today made the following statement during House debate on the burgeoning scandal over mistreatment of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in expressing revulsion at the deeply disturbing images that have ricocheted around the world, showing abuses committed by members of the U.S. armed forces against Iraqi detainees.

I have seen first-hand the abuse of civilians and others during wartime. I understand the dehumanizing humiliation that can be perpetrated against an individual. At the same time, I also know that if it were not for the bravery and heroism of the U.S. military, I probably would not be walking on this earth – and there are countless people around the world who could say the same thing.

It is important to keep in mind that the overwhelming majority of our men and women in uniform have acted honorably in fulfilling their duty in Iraq. They have risked their lives and suffered personal hardship to fulfill their responsibilities, and we continue to respect their sacrifices. These loyal soldiers have been tainted by the appalling acts of a small number of individuals.

Mr. Speaker, among the most important values that we as Americans share are our profound respect for freedom and the rule of law, our respect for the value and worth of the individual, and our commitment to protect and respect human dignity.

In this context, the images that we have seen in the past few days were simply sickening to me. They do not represent our American character. They do not represent the selfless sacrifice of more than a hundred thousand American soldiers in Iraq, trying to bring a new dawn to that country after decades of nightmare.

On a purely personal level, I find the actions of these individuals abhorrent. On behalf of all Americans, let me express my deepest regret and apologies to all those who were wrongfully mistreated at the hands of a few.

There can be no excuse for these actions. Any American should know that they are wrong. Indeed, the Geneva Conventions adopted after the Second World War clearly prohibit this behavior and were accepted by virtually every nation in the world to prevent these abuses.

But Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, these events are not merely about wrongdoing by a few foolish and misguided individuals that caused profound personal suffering. They have also damaged our credibility and crippled our efforts to pursue critical national security goals in the Middle East and around the world.

I welcome this resolution that we are considering today, Mr. Speaker, but this resolution is not enough. We must take action to be certain that such tragic and unfortunate actions do not occur again. Our standing and our goals and objectives in the Middle East require that we do more. The entire detention system in Iraq must be investigated and those responsible for perpetrating these horrendous events must be brought to justice.

Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for this episode is not only borne by the few who committed these offenses. These events represent a failure of leadership – not only in Iraq but throughout the chain of command. We must determine where and why those leadership failures occurred, and take appropriate remedial action. And we must also examine why it has taken months for this failure to be addressed. The initial reaction was slow and tepid at best. These atrocities should have generated an immediate and powerful response.

Mr. Speaker, it is not enough to say that the Iraqi people are better off today than they were under Saddam Hussein. It is not enough to say that the atrocities and human indignities that were carried out by his despicable and detested regime were more horrendous or more widespread than what we have seen in the last few days.

We are – and we should be – judged by a higher standard. Because of our history and our commitment as a nation to respect for human rights, human dignity and the rule of law, we must meet higher standards. This is who we are, and this is why we are different.

Mr. Speaker, I urge support for this resolution today, but more importantly, I urge our political and military leadership to act and to act quickly and decisively to deal with these despicable acts and the failures that allowed them. Our credibility as a nation committed to the rule of law and our efforts in the Middle East in the war against terrorism are at risk.

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