

# Rights groups accuse Europe of CIA flights coverup

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**JILL LAWLESS**

Associated Press= LONDON (AP) — A majority of 28 mostly European countries have failed to comply with freedom of information requests about their involvement in secret CIA flights carrying suspected terrorists, two human rights groups said Monday.

London-based Reprieve and Madrid-based Access Info Europe accused European nations of covering up their complicity in the so-called "extraordinary rendition" program by failing to release flight-traffic data that could show the paths of the planes.

The groups said only seven of 28 countries had supplied the requested information. Five countries said they no longer had the

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data, three refused to release it and 13 had not replied more than 10 weeks after the requests were made.

Europe's silence is in contrast to the United States, which handed over Federal Aviation Administration records with data on more than 27,000 flight segments.

The groups' report said that the U.S. had provided "by far the most comprehensive response" and accused European countries of lagging behind when it came to transparency.

"Is it an access to information problem, or is it a problem with this particular issue? It's a bit of both," said Access Info Europe executive director Helen Darbishire. "European countries have not completely faced up to their role here."

Human rights campaigners have worked for years to piece together information on hundreds of covert flights that shuttled suspected terrorists between CIA-run overseas prisons and the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay as part of the post-Sept. 11 "War on Terror."

The CIA has never acknowledged specific locations, but prisons overseen by U.S. officials reportedly operated in Thailand, Afghanistan, Lithuania, Poland and Romania — where terror suspects including Khalid Sheik Mohammad, mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, were interrogated in the basement of a government building in the capital, Bucharest.

Human rights advocates claim that the CIA used the program to outsource torture of detainees to countries where it is permitted.

In a 2007 probe, Swiss politician Dick Marty accused 14 European governments of permitting the CIA to run detention centers or carry out rendition flights over their territories between 2002 and 2005.

The European prisons were closed by May 2006, and the CIA's detention and interrogation program ended in 2009.

The Council of Europe estimated in 2007 that 1,245 CIA-operated

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flights had passed over the continent, but an accurate count may be impossible.

The human rights groups said they had identified 54 U.S.-registered aircraft believed to be involved in rendition flights. They submitted freedom of information requests to 28 mostly European countries, as well as air traffic regulator Eurocontrol, for data on the planes' movements.

Along with the United States, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania and Norway released the information. Five countries said they did not have it — Britain, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovenia.

The groups have not received a reply from Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Cape Verde, Georgia, France, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Russia, Spain and Turkey.

Canada, Portugal and Sweden declined to release the information, as did Brussels-based Eurocontrol.

In the cases of Canada's air navigation controller NAV Canada and Eurocontrol it was argued that the organizations were not public bodies and so not covered by transparency laws.

Reprieve investigator Crofton Black said Eurocontrol's silence was "a shocking indictment of European complacency."

"It's equally unacceptable that countries such as Austria, France, Italy, Latvia, Romania and Spain simply ignore requests for data relating to serious human rights abuses," Black said.

The haphazard compliance with freedom of information rules is in line with a major international survey by The Associated Press, which found that while more than 100 countries have right-to-know laws, more than half do not follow them.

The two rights groups encouraged all countries to stick to their own rules and publish any information they held on rendition flights so the

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full truth could be known.

"There has been a systematic failure across many different countries to piece this together," Darbshire said. "It's very, very worrying."

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Reprieve: [www.reprieve.org.uk](http://www.reprieve.org.uk)

Access Info Europe: <http://www.access-info.org/>

Jill Lawless can be reached at: <http://twitter.com/JillLawless>

(This version CORRECTS Corrects name of Federal Aviation Administration.)

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