

Washington D.C., May 11, 2006

Statement by President COELHO

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As President of this Temporary Committee of the European Parliament on the Transportation and Illegal Detention of Prisoners, I would like to make a first assessment of this visit to Washington.

Let me first thank all the interlocutors who have accepted to meet our delegation: lawyers, journalists, NGOs, Members of Congress and from the part of the Administration, Assistant Secretary of State Dan Fried, and the Legal Advisor of the Department of State John Bellinger, without forgetting former CIA director James Woolsey, whom we have just met.

The aim of this trip to the United States was first and foremost to enter into a dialogue with our American friends in order to put some more light on the alleged practices we have been asked to investigate.

We appreciate the readiness shown by Representatives Robert Wexler and Ed Markey and by Senators Richard Durbin and Arlen Specter to cooperate with us, but we also regret that no more Congressmen or members of this Administration and of the former one we had asked to meet have accepted or been in a position to meet our delegation. This does not contribute to a better understanding of each other's point of view, nor to the necessary reaffirmation of the common values we are supposed to share on both sides of the Atlantic.

Let me underline and reaffirm our attachment as Europeans to the fundamental principles of the state of law, to the protection of human rights in whatever circumstances and to the democratic values, all of them are in our view a precondition for a successful fight against terrorism, which remains one of the main priorities at the global stage.

Close cooperation between Europe and America is indeed of the utmost importance to defeat the scourge, which is terrorism and extremism and we are also sensible to this message constantly underlined by our American partners.

But this cooperation should proceed in full transparency and by avoiding to make recourse to similar practices as those which are precisely used by terrorists and can only lead to hatred and perpetuation of the phenomenon.

I thank you for your attention and I invite now our rapporteur Claudio Fava to add his own assessment before taking questions.