

Bush's Swiss Visit off After Complaints on Torture
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GENEVA, Feb 5 (Reuters)

Former **U.S. President George W. Bush**, under fire from human rights group over allegations of ordering torture, has cancelled a visit to Switzerland where he was to address a Jewish charity gala. Bush was to be the keynote speaker at **Keren Hayesod's annual dinner** on Feb. 12 in Geneva. But pressure has been building on the Swiss government to arrest him and open a criminal investigation if he enters the Alpine country.

Criminal complaints against Bush alleging torture have been lodged in Geneva, court officials say, and several human rights groups signaled that they were poised to take further legal action this week.

Swiss officials have said that Bush would still enjoy a certain diplomatic immunity as a former head of state. Leftist groups had also called for a protest on the day of his visit.

Keren Hayesod organisers felt the atmosphere had become too threatening because the protests raised the spectre of riots that erupted in the Swiss city during the **G8 summit** in nearby Evian, the group's lawyer, Robert Equey, told a Swiss daily.

"We didn't want to put people and property in Geneva at risk. The gala is maintained but George Bush will not take part," Equey told the **Tribune de Geneve**. "The **(criminal) complaints** did not weigh in the decision."

Geneva's Chief Prosecutor, Daniel Zappelli, has received **criminal complaints** about torture related to Bush, a court spokesman said. "We received a certain number of **complaints**. We will make no further comment," Christophe Tournier told **Reuters**.

Torture is a crime under international law and human rights experts say the absolute prohibition is very clear.

WATERBOARDING

Bush, in his "**Decision Points**" memoirs on his 2001-2009 presidency, strongly defends the use of **waterboarding**, a form of simulated drowning, on terrorism suspects as key to preventing a repeat of the deadly Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

Most human rights experts consider the practice a form of torture, banned by the **Convention on Torture**, an international pact prohibiting torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment. Switzerland and the United States are among 147 countries to have ratified the **1987 treaty**.

Dominique Baettig, a member of the **Swiss Parliament** from the right-wing **People's Party**, wrote to the **Swiss federal government** last week calling for the arrest of Bush for **alleged war crimes** if he came to the neutral country.

Rights groups had called a news conference in Geneva on Monday where Sami El Hadji, a former **Al Jazeera** journalist and former detainee at Guantanamo, was to speak on Bush's visit.

The **World Organisation against Torture** has said that Switzerland is obliged under both domestic and international law to open an inquiry for acts of torture against any individual on its territory complicit in such crimes.

"There are no laws that provide an exception for former head of states," it said in a statement on Thursday.

The Geneva-based torture watchdog, which also issued its letter to **Swiss President** Micheline Calmy-Rey, said that there was a **"compelling body of evidence about the U.S. policy of torture and ill-treatment" under the Bush administration.**

The United States had not taken any steps to assume its responsibility to carry out a full independent investigation to bring those responsible to justice for torture, it said.

Navi Pillay, U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, has said that the **treaty on torture** makes clear it is prohibited in all circumstances, including war, instability or emergency.

"And no one is left off the hook -- neither the actual torturers themselves, nor the policy-makers and public officials who define the policy or give the orders," Pillay, a former U.N. war crimes judge, said in a statement marking an international day in support of victims of torture, observed every June.