

Customers urged to boycott CSC over CIA 'torture flights'

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CSC customers are being urged to boycott the supplier over allegations that it took part in illegal CIA rendition flights in the US "war on terror".

CSC has been linked in court documents to the rendition of German citizen Khaled El-Masri, whose case against CIA collaborators in the Macedonian intelligence services is pending at the European Court of Human Rights.

El-Masri, a greengrocer from Neu-Ulm, was abducted in Macedonia on 31 December 2003 after being mistaken for a known terrorist by the CIA.

According to testimony that has been clarified by the German Bundestag, El-Masri was blindfolded, beaten, imprisoned incommunicado for 23 days, stripped, severely beaten, sodomised, chained, hooded, drugged, flown to Afghanistan, beaten, imprisoned for four months, interrogated by men in ski masks, threatened, denied legal representation, force fed, and flown to Albania on a plane allegedly chartered by CSC, where he was left on a remote road in the middle of the night approximately 1,500km from his home.

Human rights charity Reprieve has gathered documents that it says demonstrate CSC had been contracted to this and other illegal CIA renditions.

Dr Crofton Black, a researcher at Reprieve, said the charity has begun asking CSC customers not to give the supplier their business. Reprieve has already written to Transport for London (TfL) and London mayor Boris Johnson, TfL's chairman, which has paid CSC £100m on a temporary contract awarded in 2007. It has also written to the Ministry of Defence, which recently awarded CSC a £400m contract to administer pensions for veterans.

"We believe it is unethical for companies like Transport for London to give significant contracts to CSC," said Black.

Reprieve asked CSC to sign a pledge of "zero tolerance to torture", and doing any future intelligence work under the declaration that it would play no part in torture. CSC has so far refused.

"We have done research on other companies who have contractual relationships with CSC and will be writing to them. We will continue on that path until CSC signs this pledge and puts it up on its website," said Black.

CSC also declined to answer questions from Computer Weekly about the allegations, or about El-Masri's abduction and torture, instead providing a written statement that said: "CSC has for over 50 years supported governments and private sector organisations, and has done so within the law. As a matter of principle, CSC does not comment on speculation about its customers or their activities."

When asked how it could reassure customers it behaved ethically, CSC said it worked within the law and principles of corporate responsibility, ethics and compliance.

"CSC supports global human rights and generally accepted international standards. The company has developed policies and procedures in accordance with Social Accountability International's Social Accountability 8000, a voluntary standard based on International Labour Organisation and United Nation conventions," said the CSC statement.

"The CSC global workforce receives annual training on the company's Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct. All employees are required to act in accordance with the Code and Standards," it said.

TfL declined to say what assurances it had sought from CSC.

"TfL awarded a contract to CSC for IT support in 2007; this is due to run until 2014. TfL was not aware of the allegations made against CSC," it said in a written statement.

Howard Carter, general counsel of TfL, wrote to Reprieve on behalf of himself and Mayor

Johnson on 31 May. He said TfL would take appropriate action "in the event these allegations are made out". TfL declined to explain in more detail what this meant.

The German Bundestag's committee of inquiry into El-Masri's rendition confirmed his account of his ordeal was true in 2006.

Dr Dick Marty, rapporteur for a Council of Europe investigation of the allegations, said in 2007 he had evidence that proved Masri was transported from his CIA prison in Afghanistan on a chartered plane registered N982RK on 28 May 2004. It flew to Kuçova military air base in Albania. The aviation authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina raised the unusual flight patterns of this plane that had requested diplomatic permissions under a CIA identifier. The US later admitted the abduction to German premier Angela Merkel.

Documents gathered by Reprieve include invoices showing that CSC chartered N982RK, a Gulfstream jet, on the date Masri was abducted. Evidence supplied by EuroControl, the civil-military air traffic safety regulator, shows N982RK flying in stages from Washington to Kabul on 26 May 2004, and then to Kuçova air base.

Among 4,000 documents collected by Reprieve, N982RK was shown to have continued making similar circuits. Later circuits took in Luton Airport in the UK, Amman Civil Airport in Jordan and Carthage Airport in Tunisia. Other planes suspected of being used to make renditions were similarly contracted by CSC, according to Reprieve.

"We think CSC was at the top of the contracting tree for this," said Black. "It's becoming increasingly clear that CSC was the prime contractor between the government and the companies that run the flight operations."