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Former Ambassador accuses Foreign Office of covering up Human Rights abuses

Former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, who lost his job at the Foreign Office in 2005 for exposing human rights abuses, yesterday accused his former colleagues at the highest level of covering up acts of torture committed in the name of British citizens.

Speaking before a packed audience at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, Murray drew comparisons between the apathetic attitude towards intelligence gathering practices in Iraq and Guantanamo and the days of the Second World War. 'Back then we couldn't understand how the Nazis could commit those atrocities. But when I asked friends of mine, senior people at the Foreign Office, how they could live with the idea of torture and extraordinary renditions they would retort back 'I'm only doing my job'.

Murray pointed the finger at British police for not pursuing allegations that flights stopping at Prestwick were carrying suspected terrorists and snubbed the idea that the authorities didn't have enough legal leeway or evidence to do so. 'In Uzbekistan we knew exactly which planes were being used for carrying prisoners illegally but when we phoned Prestwick Airport with that information, in advance of those flights landing in Scotland, Strathclyde police refused to go on board to search for evidence, despite having the legal right to inspect any aircraft that is stationary on British soil'.

Murray slated the state of civil liberties in the UK and labelled New Labour's anti-terrorist laws as a major step back in democratic values. 'There are plenty of former British colonies that have held on to civil liberties that used to exist in this country – you don't have Ghana suspending Habeas Corpus and detaining people without charges for 42 days, for instance'.

With trademark good humour and wit, Murray felt he should justify his appearance at the Edinburgh International Book Festival despite his new book not being yet on the shelves due to legal challenges: 'After inviting Gordon Brown and John Prescott the Book Festival wanted to invite a speaker that wasn't a war criminal'.

The Edinburgh International Book Festival is running until Aug 25th in Charlotte Square Gardens, Edinburgh. Full details of all events can be found on www.edbookfest.co.uk

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