

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

As people of faith, our Scripture teaches us not to render evil for evil but to seek what is good; we cannot remain silent when evil is carried out in our name or in the name of security. Our peoples security is in the Lord who made heaven and earth. We should not justify or sit complacently as evil is done in our name; doing so violates who we are as citizens and desecrates us as a people of faith.

Thankfully, in April, the Constitution Projects high-level, bipartisan Task Force on Detainee Treatment Project issued its report on the United States use of torture during the Clinton, Bush and Obama administrations. Based on its work over a two-year period, the task force concluded that the United States indisputably engaged in torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees in violation of U.S. and international law. Military and intelligence officials authorized, condoned and committed interrogation techniques that the United States had previously condemned as illegal when used by others, including waterboarding, stress positions, extended sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation and prolonged solitary confinement. The distinguished, bipartisan credentials of the task force members including Dr. Azizah Y. al-Hibri, professor emerita at the T.C. Williams School of Law, University of Richmond, who in 2011 was appointed by President Obama to serve as a commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom legitimized its conclusions. Torture is an issue that we all must confront in order to move forward on higher moral ground.

The torture occurred in many instances and across a wide range of theaters. The task force found that the arguments that the nation did not engage in torture and that much of what occurred should be defined as something less than torture are not credible.

The panel found no firm or persuasive evidence that [the use of torture] produced significant information of value. In fact, the task force found that [t]here is substantial evidence that much of the information adduced from [torture] was not useful or reliable.

While the task forces report is an important component in our national discussion, the groups findings are just a start. The American people should have all of the facts on torture. What we need now is for the Senate Intelligence Committee to release the report of its review of millions of pages of classified materials evidence that the task force was not privileged to. The practice of torture is counterproductive to our nations interests and is in direct conflict with the values of the people of this nation. To ensure that we never torture again, the American people need to know the facts.

Jesus admonishes us in Luke 19:40: He answered, I tell you if these were silent, the stones would shout out. The Virginia Council of Churches joins with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in encouraging Sen. Mark Warner to urge the Senate Intelligence Committee, on which he serves, to make its findings public. Silence on this matter from the American people can be interpreted as condoning the practice of torture, placing us on the path to becoming the very evil we so deplore.

The Rev. Jon Barton is the general minister for the Virginia Council of Churches. He also serves on the board of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and the Commission on Interreligious Relations of the National Council of Churches. Contact him at Barton@vcc-net.org or (804) 321-3300.

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