

# National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

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### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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The critical outcry over the depictions of torture in the film *Zero Dark Thirty* has led to a series of interviews with the film's director Kathryn Bigelow, in which she has addressed the negative reactions to this provocative subject. Despite her public condemnation of torture, Bigelow takes little responsibility for her film's potentially harmful influence on public opinion.

I certainly do not think that depicting torture in a Hollywood film is equivalent to endorsing the use of torture as an accepted form of intelligence gathering. However, Bigelow has made the claim that *Zero Dark Thirty* is almost journalistic in its presentation of how our government found and killed Osama bin Laden. Given that claim, it is crucial that the film accurately describe how the intelligence used to find bin Laden was obtained (it was not collected through torture) and the harmful consequences of torture (bad intelligence, moral trauma, and increased al Qaeda recruitment). A Hollywood film like *Zero Dark Thirty* that presents an inaccurate and false interpretation of torture should not be the last word on the issue. The American public needs to see torture for what it is.

Films and television shows are made for entertainment and enjoy an extremely limited responsibility to adhere to the details of history. Nevertheless, while filmmakers like Bigelow are not obligated to document history in a rigorous fashion, television and films play a primary role in teaching Americans about history. Typically, people are more likely to learn things in a movie or on YouTube than in a government report or a textbook. When a film like *Zero Dark Thirty* disguises the truth about torture, it can have significant consequences.

That is precisely why Senators John McCain, Dianne Feinstein and Carl Levin have expressed "disappointment" with *Zero Dark Thirty*, saying "we believe the film is grossly inaccurate and misleading in its suggestion that torture resulted in information that led to the location of [O]sama bin Laden." Like the Senators, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture is also concerned about the misleading message in *Zero Dark Thirty*. NRCAT has launched a "Fact Not Fiction Campaign" to reveal the truth about torture.

Torture was not a part of the interrogation plan for every detainee, and torture most certainly did not provide the critical intelligence leading to finding bin Laden. In fact, many detainees were interrogated humanely. Senior interrogators like Ali Soufan and Matthew Alexander tell us that humane and legal interrogations are far more effective because they more frequently produce useful and reliable intelligence. Showing humane interrogations in films may not have the same cinematic appeal as showing the violent methods, but only showing abusive ones and implying that these methods worked is very misleading.

Torture provides bad intelligence. No evidence exists that suggests that beating detainees, keeping them awake with bright lights or unconscionably loud music, sexually humiliating them, or making them feel like they are drowning results in reliable information. These methods just encourage the detainee to say anything to put an end to the trauma. More importantly, torture is harmful to both the perpetrator and the victim. Former Guantanamo guard Brandon Neely provided the Huffington Post with a revealing reaction to *Zero Dark Thirty* as well as a reflection on his time as a guard at Guantanamo Bay. Neely commented, "I think the thing the film doesn't portray -- a lot of people don't realize -- is the effect torture has not only on the people being tortured but the effect it has on the guards that actually took part and witnessed it."

Torture is illegal without exception. In 1994, the United States signed the UN Convention Against Torture, which binds our country to the following stipulation: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

Most importantly, torture is a moral abomination. It dishonors all faiths and runs contrary to the teachings of all religions. It violates the dignity and worth of our society as a whole and every victim, perpetrator, and policymaker.

Recently, the Senate Intelligence Committee adopted, with bipartisan support, a more than 6,000-page report on the CIA's use of torture. The committee now needs to vote to release the report to the public for several reasons. After viewing the misleading fiction in *Zero Dark Thirty*, we need the facts about U.S.-sponsored torture not only to counter the fiction, but to help take necessary steps to ensure that our nation never tortures again. I urge the Senate Intelligence Committee to release the report as soon as possible.

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