

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

http://www.mercurynews.com/columns/ci_23057926/senate-committees-report-cia-use-torture-needs-be

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Torture is immoral, illegal and ineffective. These are simple truths that have been repeated countless times by members of the U.S. military, the CIA, the FBI, political leaders, human rights organizations and religious leaders. Sadly, the facts are constantly distorted by misleading political statements, pulp-fiction novels, thriller films such as the recent Zero Dark Thirty, and popular TV dramas such as Homeland, making it difficult for the American public to differentiate facts from fiction about the history of torture in America.

We have a unique perspective on the issue of torture, having spent time with three types of victims those who committed torture, those who were tortured, and those who saw it and spoke out against it. Some we talked with were innocent individuals in the wrong place at the wrong time; a few were combatants who, despite being tortured, provided no worthwhile information to their torturers. Those who committed torture were steadfast that they never obtained any useful information through torture. One told us that if he used torture, he could get any of us to confess to not only one, but to two or three suicide bombings.

Each of the victims, though affected in different ways, were certain that their lives and their very souls were permanently scarred. We cannot allow this to continue.

We also approach this issue from our deeply held faith perspectives, firmly believing that torture is a sin against humanity and against God. Created in the image of God, every person, innocent or guilty, bears intrinsic worth. As human beings, we have a fundamental duty to protect that worth. Thus the wounds of torture permeate not only the victims, but also the whole society. The moral fiber of every one of us who looks the other way, who does not speak out, who does not demand an end to the cruelty and full accountability and justice, is compromised.

Americas position on torture should be unequivocal. Members of the U.S. military, U.S. intelligence agencies and civilian contractors should have no doubt what torture is, that it is forbidden, and that those who commit it will be prosecuted. The fact that CIA nominee John Brennan, in his Feb. 7 confirmation hearing, refused to acknowledge that waterboarding constitutes torture is disgraceful. The time for ambiguity is over. The American people deserve to know the truth about torture so that we can stand up and demand moral and legal clarity in our laws and actions.

Today, we have a unique opportunity to learn the truth. In December, the Senate Intelligence Committee adopted, with bipartisan support, a more than 6,000-page report on the CIAs use of torture. The report is the result of the committees more than three-year investigation into the CIAs post-9/11 interrogation program, and is based on information contained in several million pages of documents detailing interrogations of detainees in CIA custody. The report is based on fact, not fiction, and in order to get those facts, we join the more than 300 faith-based organizations of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in demanding that the report be released to the public.

In contrast to these government documents, the recently released, critically acclaimed film Zero Dark Thirty conveys fictional accounts.

Due to the misleading way it communicates the story of the intelligence leading up to the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden, the film does a disservice to the American public. It has erroneously perpetuated the idea that torture by U.S. authorities was the critical source for information leading to Osama bin Laden. Senators John McCain, Californias own Dianne Feinstein and Carl Levin, all current or former members of the Senate Intelligence Committee and therefore privy to the intelligence found in the report, have criticized the film, saying, We believe the film is grossly inaccurate and misleading. This film and all the attention it has received is for many Americans the only knowledge they have on CIA torture.

Only sunlight can overcome the darkness and remove the stain of torture from our nations future. This is why we must encourage members of the Senate Intelligence Committee particularly Feinstein, who chairs it to release the results of its report. Doing so will help ensure that our government does not engage in torture again. Torture is too important an issue to allow a film to be the final arbiter. The facts need to play that role.

Craig Wiesner of Daly City is a former U.S. Air Force intelligence analyst and co-founder of Reach And Teach, a peace and social justice learning company. The Rev. Diana Gibson of Menlo Park is a Presbyterian minister and lecturer in Religious Studies at Santa Clara University. They are both members of Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice (www.multifaithpeace.org).

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