

Center for the Victims of Torture

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

<https://www.cvt.org/blog/healing-and-human-rights/five-years-later-america%E2%80%99s-dark-chapter-torture-not-over>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

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Today marks the fifth anniversary of the public release of [the executive summary, findings and conclusions](#) of the Senate Intelligence Committees report on the CIAs post 9/11 detention and interrogation program. This 525-page summary details the CIAs use of illegal torture techniques and efforts to cover them up. The criminal particulars of the program such as waterboarding and stuffing men into coffin-shaped boxes for hours methods referred to by its operators as enhanced interrogation techniques horrified Americans as we learned of the violence committed in our name.

But even at 500+ pages in length, the summary is merely a crack through which we can peer at the horrible truths contained within the full, unreleased 6,700-page Torture Report. In other words: the summary represents only a tiny fraction of the full report, the overwhelming majority of which languishes as a classified document. While the release of the executive summary half a decade ago was lauded by many, CVT included, as an important step toward transparency, the fact that the full report remains unreleased is reason for grave concern. If the full report stays buried, the lessons from its pages will go unlearned. The message sent to future administrations, as well as governments around the world, is that human rights are not fundamental enough to the U.S. for our government even to take the steps necessary to safeguard against their violation in the future. Put more bluntly, if acts of illegal torture can be concealed, it sends the message that torture remains an option.

This is a message that haunts torture survivors everywhere, CVTs clients included.

For a survivor of torture trying to heal from the physical trauma and psychological harm theyve endured, seeing the U.S. conceal its own history of torture is disturbing. I recently visited Jordan, where I spoke with CVTs clients. Many survivors voice strong feelings about justice and accountability. Some of them even feel that speaking the truth and telling their own stories in service of justice is worth the associated risks. Their courage raises the question: how can an organization as powerful as the CIA not confront the truth and admit that it has destroyed lives using torture when they knew it was illegal, ineffective and wrong? How can a country once looked to as a symbol of strength and principle not admit its moral shortcomings?

I think about [Qassem](#) from Syria. He survived torture the CIA would have deemed enhanced interrogation techniques, enduring stress positions and humiliation, followed by even more extreme torture. I think about [Imad](#), another survivor whose torture the CIA wouldve called enhanced interrogation techniques. His torturers hung and beat him. He had no information, yet they tortured him anyway. Finally released, he fled to Jordan. After completing CVTs healing journey, he felt his next step was to stand and tell his story despite the security and personal risks. This takes true courage. There is some measure of accountability in the act of telling the truth. And given that all the victims of the CIA torture program were Muslim men, the total lack of CIA accountability must be even more unsettling for men of courage like Qassem and Imad.

Five years ago, our government took a step in the right direction in beginning to uncover the truth about the CIA torture program. There is still a long way to go. From the torture programs operators to former President Obama, there is a disturbingly broad sentiment that this chapter of our countrys history is over. But there has been no meaningful institutional reform, no acknowledgment of and apology to individual victims, no redress, no rehabilitation, and no accountability. This weakens our moral standing in the world and undermines the efforts of other countries to take appropriate steps to reckon with their repressive pasts. It also leaves open the possibility of a return to government-sanctioned torture.

Releasing the executive summary was a critical first step. Its long past time we take the next one, and release the full Torture Report. Torture survivors look to CVT for healing; they should be able to look to the U.S. for how to right the most egregious of wrongs.

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