

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

https://www.pennlive.com/opinion/2013/05/to_move_past_torture_america_must_confront_its_responsib

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

In one of his first actions as president, Barack Obama signed an executive order banning the use of torture. The diverse faith-based organizations across the country that are members of the **National Religious Campaign Against Torture** celebrated his action, hoping it would be a first step in ending a shameful time in our nation's history.

The order may have officially put an end to U.S.-sponsored torture, but since then, the administrations message has been horrifying to say the least. President Obama seemingly believes that in regards to torture during the post-Sept. 11 era, we must look forward and leave the past behind.

There are two major problems with this philosophy. First, we must examine what happened so that we can understand and enact safeguards to ensure it never happens again. Second, without further examination and action, much-needed healing cannot happen for victims of torture including those who suffered physical pain as well as perpetrators who experience emotional discomfort for their actions.

On April 16, the high-level, bipartisan **Task Force on Detainee Treatment of The Constitution Project** released a comprehensive, 500-page report documenting how the United States used interrogation techniques on detainees that it had previously condemned as illegal. These techniques included waterboarding, stress positions, extended sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation and prolonged solitary confinement.

The report tells a story of how government lawyers turned a blind eye to legality by portraying illegal activities as legal. The ruse stretched to the highest levels of government, and the perceived message was anything goes in the quest to obtain information from U.S. detainees some of whom have never been charged with connections to terrorism.

Prisoners suffered at the hands of capricious and cruel captors who tortured and dehumanized them in the name of gathering intelligence despite clear evidence that these tactics fail to produce reliable information that can be used to prevent future terrorist acts.

A key recommendation of the task force is that the American people should have access to all the facts on torture.

This includes the release of the **Senate Intelligence Committee** report on post-Sept. 11 CIA interrogation, adopted in December but as yet still classified, which would help Americans understand the realities of detainee treatment done in their name.

The task force also finds that those who have used and would use torture in the future should not be permitted to hide behind a veil of secrecy.

This means that evidence of past abuse should be declassified; the state-secrets privilege should not be invoked to dismiss lawsuits by victims of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment at the pleadings stage and the **International Committee of the Red Cross** should have access to all detainees.

Finally, it recommends that Congress pass legislation that makes clear that acts of torture, war crimes, and crimes against humanity are not legitimate "intelligence sources and methods" under the **National Security Act**.

The **Pennsylvania Council of Churches** is opposed to torture in any form. We believe that it is always wrong, and that its use is immoral, violates the dignity of other human beings, and works to corrupt us as a society. We also believe that government must be transparent and accountable. We assert that preventing torture and holding those who permitted and promoted it accountable will help to begin a much needed process of healing for all affected.

We join with our interfaith partners at the **National Religious Campaign Against Torture** to join in calling for the public release of the **Senate Select Intelligence Committee** report, as we work to put an end to U.S.-sponsored torture forever.

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