

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

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Public Facing Advocacy Writing

By David Leslie and Richard Killmer

Yes, America, we

. And there is a step that Oregonians can take now to help ensure that U.S.-sponsored torture never happens again.

The torture in which our government engaged was illegal, abhorrent and cruel. Detainees died as a result of American torture, and former President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld knew about it and were involved in authorizing it.

It wasn't just the White House, Department of Defense and CIA that were engaged in torture, but also institutions that have traditionally held longstanding commitments to integrity. Our Justice Department "repeatedly gave erroneous legal sanction and misrepresented facts," according to the

, which recently published a two-year, 500-page study describing in detail American torture as egregious. Furthermore, the U.S. Army modified its manual to incorporate acts of torture. And even the medical community violated its "above all, do no harm" creed.

So, where do we go from here? President Barack Obama's approach is to put this matter quietly behind us. But democracy and torture cannot peacefully coexist in the same body politic. For there to be a catalyst for change, we call on the government to take several important steps.

must be shuttered forever, and officials there must stop force-feeding detainees. The United States must be sure to refrain from transferring detainees to countries where they will be subjected to further torture. And U.S. officials must cease to invoke "state-secrets privilege" to deflect lawsuits. The public deserves the truth.

It's time for our government to disclose all information related to U.S. government-sponsored torture to the American people. For this to happen, it is crucial that the Senate Intelligence Committee share its report on CIA torture with the public. It was adopted by the committee in December, but months later, it remains hidden from public view. Our own

, as a member of the Intelligence Committee, has an important role. He should urge his colleagues to vote for the report's public release.

While its findings are a difficult pill to swallow, let us not look at the Constitution Project's report as a harsh condemnation of who we are as a nation, but rather as a catalyst for reflection and a chance for a renewed commitment to the United States' refusal to use torture -- a position held by faith communities throughout our country.

According to the report, "Task Force members believe that having as thorough as possible understanding of what occurred ... and a willingness to acknowledge any shortcomings -- strengthens the nation and equips us to better cope with the next crisis and ones after that."

We must know the truth so that we do not allow history to repeat itself. We have a moral obligation to learn from our mistakes and to make better decisions in the future.

The Senate Intelligence Committee should follow this lead. By releasing its report, its members can demonstrate their commitment to pick up the ball and finish the work of once again becoming a nation that lives out its founders' dedication to transparency and democracy. Sen. Wyden can be a leader in this effort.

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