

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

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This country went somewhat crazy after the horrors of 9/11. Increased airport security might seem at times a nuisance, but we put up with it because we know it has been put in place to prevent another plane hijacking or bombing. The things that are crazy are going to war with Iraq when Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11 or using torture on so-called enemy combatants or on anyone who was unlucky enough to be rightly or wrongly labeled a terrorist.

Torture, no matter what excuse can be given for its use, is always wrong. We grow up believing that the United States is a force for good in the world, or at the very least, is striving to do good. Unfortunately, when we grow up, we realize that our country isn't always a force for good. The use of torture after 9/11 was and remains one of those times. Though President Barack Obama outlawed the future use of torture through executive order after taking office in 2009, I say that torture remains a blemish on our moral and legal character because its nature has yet to be revealed in full.

On April 16, 2013, the Constitution Projects bipartisan Task Force on Detainee Treatment released a 500-page report. Based on research over a two-year period, the task force concluded that the United States indisputably engaged in torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (CID) of 9/11 detainees in violation of U.S. and international law and for which there was no justification. The task force also concluded that the decision to use torture and CID came from our top political leaders, including President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

As thorough as the task force report was, it is not the final word on torture. The Senate Intelligence Committee has conducted its own investigation into post-9/11 torture, for which it reviewed more than 6 million pages of documents. The report on the Intelligence Committee's investigation is more than 6,000 pages, and though the committee approved it in a bipartisan vote back in December of last year, it remains classified and hidden from public view.

The Intelligence Committee is due to vote this fall on whether or not to make this report public, and I argue that the American people have the right to know what was done in our name. We need to know the whole truth about torture that it is shocking, horrible, ineffective and, ultimately, harmful to our nation's long-term security. We must contact our senators and tell them that this report must be released to the public. This democracy cannot function as our founders intended if the public is left in the dark especially when it comes to something as important as torture.

As a member of Pax Christi Santa Fe, the local chapter of an international Catholic peace organization started after the horrors of World War II, I cannot sit idly by as our government fails to be transparent about the horrors undertaken so recently. As a Christian, I was taught to love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

So I join with people of faith from hundreds of diverse religious and faith-based backgrounds who have come together through the National Religious Campaign Against Torture to call on the Senate Intelligence Committee to release its report on U.S.-sponsored torture. We cannot permit our values to be manipulated by the very terrorists who attacked us on 9/11; such a failure would be a victory for them. Values are forever. Let's remember that as we seek to be citizens of a country that never permits or condones torture.

Bud Ryan, founder of Pax Christi Santa Fe, lives near Madrid.

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