

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

https://bismarcktribune.com/news/columnists/release-the-torture-report/article_22a127b6-5380-11e3-9ad9-0019bb2963f4.html

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Approximately 2,000 years ago, a man called Jesus of Nazareth was tortured to death. While I grew up believing that he, as a person of God, gave himself as a sacrifice for humanity, the human victims of torture have no such choice.

As the daughter and granddaughter of ministers, and as a future minister myself, I take the crucifixion as a warning against the violent use of power to silence those with lesser power, the meek of our world. I remember crying in pain and fear on the Good Fridays of my youth; the crucifixion felt brutal to me because it was brutal. The theology of resurrection has promised that violence torture is not Gods way and that we can overcome it.

I have been saddened and outraged to learn that my own government has tortured those less powerful. The Task Force on Detainee Treatment, a non-governmental, bipartisan group, recently completed a two-year investigation into the U.S. governments treatment of 9/11 detainees, concluding indisputably that the U.S. government engaged in illegal torture. Drawing on public records and task force members interviews with eyewitnesses, the report describes numerous examples of torture, including cases where individuals were tortured to death. The task force was co-chaired by high-level individuals from each party Asa Hutchinson, former under secretary of the Department of Homeland Security during the George W. Bush administration and a former Republican member of Congress from Arkansas; and James Jones, a former Democratic member of Congress from Oklahoma and ambassador to Mexico providing further legitimacy for its findings.

While torture cannot be justified against any of Gods creatures, this report accurately dispels the claim that those who were tortured in some way deserved it. According to the report, the United States captured, imprisoned and cruelly mistreated detainees. This is inexcusable, no matter what ones crime is. The report revealed that we also used interrogation techniques our country had previously condemned as illegal, including waterboarding, stress positions, extended sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation and prolonged solitary confinement.

The report states, The events examined in this report are unprecedented in U.S. history. In the course of the nations many previous conflicts, there is little doubt that some U.S. personnel committed brutal acts against captives. But there is no evidence there had ever before been the kind of considered and detailed discussions that occurred after September 11, directly involving a president and his top advisers on the wisdom, propriety and legality of inflicting pain and torment on some detainees in our custody.

Indeed, it seems weve become nearly immune to the horrors of torture, though torture serves no practical purpose. My foster children watch shows in which an excruciating handshake or the interruption of pain meds can cause the victims to blurt out crucial clues, as if the difference between lack of information and really good information is the difference between degrees of pain applied. In the real world, however, brutal acts rarely yield good information. The task force found no firm or persuasive evidence that the (use of torture) produced significant information of value. In fact, the task force found that there is substantial evidence that much of the information adduced from (torture) was not useful or reliable.

Task force members did not have access to classified information, and were therefore limited in what they were able to review. Fortunately, the task force report is not the final word on torture. The Senate Intelligence Committee has conducted its own investigation into torture, for which it reviewed more than 6 million pages of documents. The task force report shows that our government authorized and encouraged the use of torture. Now, the Senate Intelligence Committee must also release its report so the full truth on U.S. torture will be known and so we can ensure that torture is never used again.

I join people of faith from hundreds of diverse faith-based groups who share a responsibility to advocate for an end to torture, in coming together through the National Religious Campaign Against Torture to call on the Senate Intelligence Committee to share the truth with the American public. The committee must release the facts about our countrys history of torture in our name. If we are not advocates for an end to torture, in this modern-day story of violence and power, who else are we to be?

(Karen Van Fossan of Bismarck is communications director for Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota and is former president of the North Dakota Peace Coalition. She attends United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, where she is studying to become a minister.)

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