

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

<https://bangordailynews.com/2014/03/19/opinion/collins-king-should-vote-to-release-cia-torture-report-reduce-likelihood-of-future-torture-in-the-process/>

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As a Presbyterian minister, the founding executive director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, and a resident of the state of Maine, I hope that Sens. Susan Collins and Angus King, both members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, will vote to release the committee's report on CIA torture.

In 2009, the committee began what became a several-year investigation into CIA torture, during which it reviewed more than 6 million pages of documents. On Dec. 13, 2012, the Senate Intelligence Committee approved the report on the investigation with a bipartisan vote. Unfortunately, the report has remained classified hidden from the American people. It is time for the committee to vote to make the report public.

I believe that God created human beings in God's image and therefore requires that everyone be treated with dignity and respect. Torture is an egregious violation of the dignity and worth of every human being involved, including the torturer and the victim. I do not want my nine grandchildren (three of whom live in our state of Maine) to grow up in a country that may torture again in the future.

Our country will benefit in multiple ways if Maine senators vote to release the report.

The American public will never know the facts about torture contained in the report unless it is released. Knowledge of the facts would help prevent the U.S. government from using torture again. In an age of government secrecy, our senators have the opportunity to lead the effort to share the truth with the American people.

The report would reinforce for Americans that torture is horrific and immoral and runs contrary to the teachings of all religions and dishonors all faiths. The implication of the Golden Rule is clear: Torture should not be used on others because we would not want others to torture us.

The report may describe how the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel argued that waterboarding and other acts of torture were somehow justified and legal, instead of clear violations of the law. More Americans may learn, thanks to the report, that U.S. law prohibits anyone from engaging in torture. That fact should help prevent its use in the future.

If the report is released, we may, as American citizens, have the knowledge necessary to suggest specific achievable safeguards that would make it more difficult for a future president to manipulate the law to allow torture. If the report is not released, then future presidents may have the opportunity to again mischaracterize the law in order to authorize torture. At a minimum, the report will likely encourage further congressional oversight on this issue.

Too many of our fellow Americans seem to believe that under certain circumstances, the use of torture is justified. Video games, films and TV series reinforce that belief by portraying torture as effective. The information in the committee report could help counter those messages.

Releasing the report will show the moral strength of our nation both to our enemies and our friends. We will demonstrate that we are able to acknowledge and learn from our wrongdoing an important step because the U.S. torture program has caused us to lose significant international prestige as a leader in human rights.

In November 2008, the Senate Armed Services Committee issued a report on the U.S. military's use of torture. Our military personnel were better off for that report because while it disclosed hard, painful facts, it also helped ensure that our military could not be misused by those in authority to carry out human rights abuses that are contrary to the ideals of our fighting men and women. Similarly, the Senate Intelligence Committee's report on torture can help to ensure that the CIA will never authorize or use torture again.

Recent news stories suggesting that the CIA has attempted to withhold important documents from the Intelligence Committee, searched committee computers, and allegedly attempted to intimidate committee staff only stress the importance of making this report public. The American people deserve to know the facts and not have them covered up.

The United States will benefit if the results of the report are produced. I join people of all faiths in urging Collins and King to vote to release the report. Our nation will be stronger and better for it.

Rev. Richard Killmer is the founding executive director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. He lives in Yarmouth.