

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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

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Torture? In America? I am deeply saddened that the answer is yes to both questions. Torture in any form is wrong; torture in a country devoted to the noble principles of liberty and justice for all is shameful and deeply disappointing. Through the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, I have joined with people of faith from hundreds of diverse religious and faith-based groups to bring to light the truth of our nations terrible actions that were committed in the name of all of us.

Earlier this year, a non-governmental, bipartisan task force led by Asa Hutchinson, the former undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security during the George W. Bush administration and a former Republican congressman from Arkansas, and James Jones, a former Democratic member of Congress from Oklahoma and ambassador to Mexico, released a 500-page report on our governments treatment of 9/11 detainees. This task force, convened by the Constitution Project, concluded that the U.S. government indisputably engaged in torture.

The report tells us that various branches of our government decided that torturing detainees in the aftermath of 9/11 was somehow justifiable. Interrogation techniques that we have previously condemned are described in the task forces report: Some detainees were literally tortured to death, while other prisoners suffered from waterboarding, stress positions, extended sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation and prolonged solitary confinement.

Torture is illegal, without exception. In 1994, the United States signed the United Nations Convention Against Torture, which binds our country to the following stipulation: No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.

Torture is immoral because it is egregiously violates the dignity and worth of every human being both the torturer and the tortured. It runs contrary to the teachings of all faiths and dishonors all in whose name it is conducted.

The horrors detailed in this report are almost too much to bear, but there is another report that is likely to share even more and without it, we will not have the full story.

The U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee has conducted its own investigation into torture in which it reviewed more than 6 million pages of documents. The report is more than 6,000 pages long and is based, in part, on information contained in classified documents that were not available to the task force.

The Senate Intelligence Committee approved its report in a bipartisan vote way back in December of last year, and is likely to vote as early as this month on whether to release the report. The report needs to be made available to the public so that the American people can learn the whole truth about torture, including its grave impact on our nations long-term security.

I join members of diverse faith-based and religious groups coming together through the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in urging the Senate Intelligence Committee to release its report so that we may know the truth. Our government must be accountable to the American people.

If we are kept in the dark about the use of torture, then our government ceases to adhere to our founding principles. Our nation ought rightfully to be ashamed and insistent on a return to morality and justice.

The Rev. Peter Shober is the senior pastor of the University Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) in Missoula.

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