

Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order On Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty

Though we come from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life, we agree that the use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against prisoners is immoral, unwise, and un-American.

In our effort to secure ourselves, we have resorted to tactics which do not work, which endanger US personnel abroad, which discourage political, military, and intelligence cooperation from our allies, and which ultimately do not enhance our security.

Our President must lead us by our core principles. We must be better than our enemies, and our treatment of prisoners captured in the battle against terrorism must reflect our character and values as Americans.

Therefore, we believe the President of the United States should issue an Executive Order that provides as follows:

The “Golden Rule.” We will not authorize or use any methods of interrogation that we would not find acceptable if used against Americans, be they civilians or soldiers.

One national standard. We will have one national standard for all US personnel and agencies for the interrogation and treatment of prisoners. Currently, the best expression of that standard is the US Army Field Manual, which will be used until any other interrogation technique has been approved based on the Golden Rule principle.

The rule of law. We will acknowledge all prisoners to our courts or the International Red Cross. We will in no circumstance hold persons in secret prisons or engage in disappearances. In all cases, prisoners will have the opportunity to prove their innocence in ways that fully conform to American principles of fairness.

Duty to protect. We acknowledge our historical commitment to end the use of torture and cruelty in the world. The US will not transfer any person to countries that use torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

Checks and balances. Congress and the courts play an invaluable role in protecting the values and institutions of our nation and must have and will have access to the information they need to be fully informed about our detention and interrogation policies.

Clarity and accountability. All US personnel—whether soldiers or intelligence staff—deserve the certainty that they are implementing policy that complies fully with the law. Henceforth all US officials who authorize, implement, or fail in their duty to prevent the use of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners will be held accountable, regardless of rank or position.

*This initiative is coordinated by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture,
Evangelicals for Human Rights, and the Center for Victims of Torture.*