

Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever DVD Discussion Guide for Muslims

Introduction

Since 2002, the United States government has engaged in torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. These practices are illegal under U.S. law and considered immoral within most, if not all, faith traditions.

This discussion guide was prepared by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) to facilitate discussion of the video “Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever.” **You can view and download the video, order a copy of it on DVD for \$5.00, and access all the resources and links mentioned in this discussion guide at: www.nrcat.org/300.**

The video describes the torture practices of the U.S. government since 9/11, portrays the lasting effects on the survivors of torture around the world, and offers perspectives from a variety of faiths. Most faiths affirm that torture is a moral issue and that torture is always wrong.

Six different versions of this discussion guide (all available on the NRCAT web site) have been prepared to address the needs of different faith groups: Muslims, mainline Protestants, evangelical Christians, Jews, Catholics and Unitarian Universalists. To download any of these versions, go to: www.nrcat.org/DVDguide.

NRCAT is also suggesting that you make copies of its statement on a Commission of Inquiry (www.nrcat.org/COIpetition) and ask that participants in the session consider endorsing the statement.

Suggestions for Using this DVD

This video best lends itself to an adult Muslim education setting. Many mosques have an adult class that meets on the weekends and addresses a variety of issues. We have provided a one-session and a two-session option for video screening and discussion. Each session is designed for an hour or less, and we have suggested a time breakdown for each session.

This resource could also be used in:

- Older youth or college group
- Women’s or men’s organization
- A longer, seminar-style session that uses the two-session discussion guide in a single sitting
- An ecumenical or interfaith setting

Preparing for the Discussion

We suggest that facilitators preview the video and read through the discussion guide to decide how you would like to present the material. Think through your own feelings and responses, so you are not surprised during the discussion. Feel free to add your own thoughts, questions, and prayers! The video includes religious voices of various faiths – all stating that torture is wrong. However, there may be a variety of opinions expressed during the discussion, and openness and honesty should be encouraged.

Here is a quick preparation checklist:

- **Register your participation in the project at www.nrcat.org/300.**
- Advertise early and often within and outside the congregation. Announce it in worship. Consider a press release.
- Decide on the number of sessions.
- Determine the tasks you will accomplish during each session.
- Determine who will participate in leadership and reading of questions/prayers.
- Test the DVD with the equipment (DVD player and TV) you will be using for the session.
- Make copies of NRCAT's petition form calling for a Commission of Inquiry as one way for participants to join the effort to end U.S.-sponsored torture. You can download a copy from the NRCAT website at www.nrcat.org/COIp petition.
- Occasionally participants will ask for the definition of torture that is being used. A link to the definition from the Convention Against Torture, which is U.S. law, can be found at www.nrcat.org/definition.

Additional Resources

As a facilitator you may want to visit or encourage participants to visit www.nrcat.org, where we have a list of our member organizations, statements on torture from Islamic leaders, further worship and prayer resources, and ways that your mosque can become involved to end U.S.-sponsored torture. Many of these resources could be helpful both in your preparation for the class and in your community's discernment about its response.

Session Outlines

Single Session Study

Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Ask participants to introduce themselves. Then introduce the class and the video. Here is a sample introduction: “We come to this discussion session with many thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, some of which we may not even be aware. We may have conflicting views. The purpose of this discussion is for us to begin to discuss U.S. practices and to look at that policy through the eyes of faith. We will specifically be exploring the contrast between the reality that many Americans believe torture is justifiable in some situations and the perspective of Quran verses and our Islamic tradition that has led many people to conclude that torture is always wrong. We ask that you keep an open mind to one another and an open heart during this session.”

Video Screening (20 minutes)

Insert DVD and select “For a single session” from the main menu. The video will begin screening immediately.

Discussion (30 minutes total)

Now we’ll discuss some of what our faith traditions say on the issue of torture.

1. In the video, Dr. Sayyid Syeed from the Islamic Society of North America said that part of the reason he chose to obtain American citizenship is because he believed that the United States was a model for the rest of the world. In his eyes, the U.S. fell short of these standards with its practice of state sponsored torture. How do you relate to his experience? Did you, or someone you know, immigrate to the United States for similar reasons? How can you relate to his frustration and disappointment when learning about harsh interrogation practices? Have your views about the U.S. as a model for the rest of the world changed? (10 minutes)
2. The Quran emphasizes the fundamental right to dignity for human beings. Muslims have a duty to uphold this right and are prohibited from torturing all living creatures. What specific passages from the Quran or teachings from Prophet Muhammad can you think of that best highlight or exemplify this concept? (10 minutes)
3. In the video, Dr. David Gushee, President of Evangelicals for Human Rights, sums up the reasons why he thinks people of faith should care about torture. He says, “Issues can simultaneously be policy issues, security issues, military issues and moral issues. And I join the many others in this country that believe that it’s all of that, that torture is a moral issue. And it violates principles of basic justice and humanity. From a deeper religious perspective, or Christian perspective, it’s the most unloving thing you can do to a person. It’s hateful and contemptuous and therefore contemptible.” We often hear that this is more a security issue, but Dr. Gushee argues that it can also be a moral issue on which our faith should be brought to bear. What do you think about his statement? How does it also apply to Islam? (5 minutes)
4. We heard from Rabbi Gerry Serotta, from Rabbis for Human Rights, that “The basic element of why we’re opposed to torture in any form whatsoever is the idea that human beings are created in the image of God.” As Muslims, we believe this means that each person is born with inherent human dignity. How should we view both our friends and our enemies? How does this concept inform our understanding of torture policy? (5 minutes)

Closing Prayer (prayed by facilitator or a participant)

Two Session Study

Session 1

Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Ask each participant to introduce themselves. Then introduce the class and the video. Here is a sample introduction: “We come to this discussion session with many thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, some of which we may not even be aware. We may have conflicting views. The purpose of this discussion is for us to begin to discuss U.S. practices and to look at that policy through the eyes of faith. We will specifically be exploring the contrast between the reality that many Americans believe torture is justifiable in some situations and the perspective of Quran verses and our Islamic tradition that has led many people to conclude that torture is always wrong. We ask that you keep an open mind to one another and an open heart during this session.”

Video Screening (10 minutes)

Insert the DVD and select “For two sessions” from the main menu. Then select “Session 1.” The video should begin screening immediately and is 10 minutes long.

Discussion (30 minutes)

1. In the video, we heard a great deal about the American identity and issues of torture. We heard Linda Gustitis, president of NRCAT say, “I have always been a patriotic and proud American...and that’s where my passion on this issue comes from.” How do we feel as Americans about what we have just seen and heard in the video? How does it shift our understanding of patriotism? (8 minutes)
2. We heard from Brigadier General Steve Xenakis (ret) that American military policy from the time of George Washington, and later American law, has banned the use of torture. Why did this policy change? Why do you think the public let it happen? (8 minutes)
3. How did we feel on 9/11? Afraid? Angry? (Allow the participants to respond) We wanted to make sure that an attack in which more than 3000 people died will never happen again. Our government came to the same conclusion, but they chose an immoral and illegal path. (8 minutes)
4. We heard from Matthew Alexander, a military interrogator, that the use of torture is actually counter-productive for gaining useful information for intelligence because the use of torture incites anger in others and inspires them to fight against the United States. How do you feel about the fact that we have used torture practices despite their proven liabilities? (6 minutes)

In the next session, we will think about the use of the torture in light of our faith. We will hear resources from many faith traditions and reflect on our own. In the next [week] (whatever time will be between sessions), we invite you to think about how you feel about torture as a moral issue. How do you feel as a Muslim? What do you feel called to do in light of your faith?

Closing Prayer (you can pray or ask a participant to pray)

Session 2

Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Ask each participant to introduce themselves. Then introduce the class and the video. Here is a sample introduction: “We come to this discussion session with many thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, some of which we may not even be aware. We may have conflicting views. The purpose of this discussion is for us to begin to discuss U.S. practices and to look at that policy through the eyes of faith. We will specifically be exploring the contrast between the reality that many Americans believe torture is justifiable in some situations and the perspective of Quran verses and our Islamic tradition that has led many people to conclude that torture is always wrong. We ask that you keep an open mind to one another and an open heart during this session.”

Video Screening (10 minutes)

Insert the DVD and select “For two sessions” from the main menu. Then select “Session 2.” The video should begin screening immediately and will take about 10 minutes.

Discussion (30 minutes)

Ask participants to discuss these questions:

1. In the video, Dr. Sayyid Syeed from the Islamic Society of North America said that part of the reason he chose to obtain American citizenship is because he believed that the United States was a model for the rest of the world. In his eyes, the U.S. fell short of these standards with its practice of state sponsored torture. How can you relate to his experience? Did you, or someone you know, immigrate to the United States for similar reasons? How can you relate to his frustration and disappointment when learning about harsh interrogation practices? Have your views about the U.S. as a model for the rest of the world changed? (10 minutes)
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Closing Prayer (you can pray or ask a participant to pray).