



National Religious Campaign Against Torture

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Members
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the House Armed Services Committee:

We write to you as leaders of American faith communities to express our concern about the prolonged indefinite detention of individuals apprehended during our conflict with al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. In particular, we are opposed to any effort to expand the use of indefinite detention – an outcome that we fear would result from provisions in S. 551 or H.R. 968 if either were to become law.

Prolonged indefinite detention without trial is damaging to the well-being of the individual detained and it is morally harmful to a society that comes to see that as acceptable. Further, indefinite detention has, in our recent past, been associated with torture.

Our faiths tell us to respect the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings, yet our country has not always done so. We must not continue to repeat the immoral mistakes of the past, but instead begin anew by rejecting any effort to authorize an increase in the use of indefinite detention without trial. The moral teachings of our faith traditions exist for precisely this purpose – to guide us through difficult questions when times are hard, helping us to remember to always pursue justice.

S. 551 specifically “reaffirms that the President is authorized to detain unprivileged enemy belligerents in connection with the continuing armed conflict with al Qaeda, the Taliban, and affiliated groups, regardless of the place of capture, until the termination of hostilities.” H.R. 968 contains similar language. Because the conflict with al Qaeda is both global and without apparent end, one could understand this provision as giving the Executive the privilege of detaining people from any country, at any time, and then holding them, without trial, for as long as the Executive deems necessary. Such a power is inherently troubling.

We believe that indefinite detention is contrary to the teachings of our faiths and the ideals of our country. As people of faith, we ask you to oppose any expansion of our country’s use of prolonged indefinite detention.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon
General Secretary
National Council of Churches

Rabbi David Saperstein
Director and Counsel
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

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