



Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever An Interfaith Discussion Guide *Updated January 2013*

Background

After the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the United States government tortured many detainees it suspected of having some connection to terrorism. The use of torture is illegal under U.S. law and considered immoral by all faith traditions.

Millions of people have seen the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* and many of them walked out of the theater believing they saw a historically accurate account of the events leading to the capture of Osama bin Laden. Unfortunately, the filmmakers chose to imply – inaccurately – that torture led to reliable intelligence in the hunt for bin Laden. However, the movie is not based on the facts about the U.S.’s use of torture. *Zero Dark Thirty* is fiction. It inaccurately suggests that the use of torture by U.S. authorities led directly to bin Laden’s capture. As a result, the movie implicitly justifies torture’s use.

Moreover, at no point do the filmmakers point out that torture is immoral and illegal. Neither do they choose to show the demonstrated ineffectiveness of “enhanced interrogation” techniques – nor the effectiveness of rapport-building and other humane techniques.

In December 2012, the Senate Intelligence Committee adopted, with a bipartisan vote, a more than 6,000 page report on the CIA’s use of torture. The report is the result of the Committee’s more than three-year investigation of the CIA post-9/11 interrogation program. The Committee report is based on information contained in several million pages of documents detailing interrogations of detainees in CIA custody. Senator McCain, who was an ex officio member of the Intelligence Committee, said, “It was not torture, or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of detainees that got us the major leads that ultimately enabled our intelligence community to find Osama bin Laden.” Several other Senators have echoed McCain’s statement.

Though *Zero Dark Thirty* is fiction, the report from the Senate Intelligence Committee contains the facts and should be made public. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is working vigorously for the release of the report. The American people have the right to know the facts about the CIA torture program in order to not only judge the fiction presented by *Zero Dark Thirty* but, more importantly, to advocate that safeguards be put in place to prevent torture from ever happening again.

This discussion guide was prepared by NRCAT to facilitate discussion of NRCAT’s 20 minute film “Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever.” **You can view and download the film, order a copy of it on DVD, download promotional materials, and access all the resources and links mentioned in this discussion guide at: www.nrcat.org/factnotfiction-video.**

The NRCAT film describes the use of torture by the U.S. government since 9/11, portrays the lasting effects on the survivors of torture around the world, offers perspectives from a variety of faiths, and addresses how positive depictions of torture in popular entertainment are misleading at best.

There will likely be participants in the room who will want to take steps to ensure that torture never happens again. Signing NRCAT's statement "A Call for the Facts" is an important step. Please make copies of the petition version of the statement available during the showing of the film. NRCAT will send the names to the President.

Suggestions for Using this DVD

This film best lends itself to small group settings for discussion. Many congregations have shown it during an adult education class. An outline for a 60 minute session is provided, including a suggested time breakdown for the session.

This resource could also be used in:

- Older youth or college groups
- Women's or men's organizations
- Social ministry meetings
- Adult education programs
- A weekend retreat
- Any interfaith setting

Preparing for the Discussion

We suggest that facilitators preview the film 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, reflections, and questions. The film includes religious voices of various faiths – all stating that torture is wrong. There may be a variety of opinions expressed during the discussion, however, and openness and honesty should be encouraged.

Here is a quick preparation checklist:

- Be sure to let us know about your viewing and discussion by registering at <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/fact-not-fiction-campaign>.
- Advertise early and often about the upcoming discussion session within the congregation. Announce it in worship or other appropriate venues. Sample promotional materials are available at www.nrcat.org/factnotfiction-video.
- Determine the tasks you want to accomplish during the screening.
- Determine who will participate in leadership and reading of questions/meditations.
- Test the film with the equipment (DVD player and TV or Computer and Projector) you will be using for the session.
- Print NRCAT's petition "A Call for the Facts," found in Appendix 2.
- Occasionally, participants will ask for the definition of torture that is being used. The definition from the Convention Against Torture, which is U.S. law, is included in Appendix 1.

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 a variety of denominations, further worship and prayer resources, and ways that you can work to ensure that U.S.-sponsored torture never happens again. Many of these resources could be helpful in your preparation for the class.

Session Outline

Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)

Open with prayer, if that is your tradition, and if needed ask participants to introduce themselves.

Then introduce the class and the film *Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever* by saying something like:

“We are offering this session on the moral and religious implications of torture in order to provide a safe and open place in which we can express our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. 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 our faith. The film lifts up the tension between the sacredness of the human being as taught by the world’s faiths, and the conviction many people hold that torture is justifiable under some circumstances. Our own faith teaches that every human being has been created with worth and dignity, and yet some of us may also believe – however uneasily – that sometimes torture is necessary. We ask that you keep an open mind to one another, listen respectfully and share as honestly as you’re able.”

Film Screening (20 minutes)

Insert DVD and play the film.

Discussion (30 minutes)

[Depending on the size of the group, you may want to have the participants discuss one or more of these questions in pairs or threes, rather than as a large group. You probably won’t have time to get to all these questions, so review them and perhaps choose the questions that you believe will be most helpful. You might consider only using four questions.]

Now we’ll discuss some of the issues raised in this film.

1. In the film, Dr. David Gushee, Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University, 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.”

Torture is most often discussed as a security issue, but Dr. Gushee argues that it is a moral issue on which faith should be brought to bear. What do you think about his statement in the context of your own faith commitments?

2. We heard from Rabbi Gerry Serotta, from Clergy Beyond Borders, 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.” We might use different vocabularies of faith, but we declare much the same thing. Are there ever circumstances during which our religious values should trump our need for national security?
3. In the film, Dr. Stephen Colecchi, Director of the Office of International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, says torture is “an intrinsic evil”—something

that cannot be morally justified under any circumstances. What teachings of your faith do you bring to considerations about torture?

4. In the film, 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. Have your views about the U.S. as a model for the rest of the world changed?
5. In the film Brigadier General (Ret.) Stephen Xenakis emphasized that American military policy banned the use of torture from the time of George Washington. Why did the U.S. government change this policy? Why do you think there was not more public debate over this change before the use of torture was implemented?
6. Torture harms not only its victims, but torturers too. Attorney Gita Gutierrez said, “When the torturer comes home, someone who has numbed themselves enough and dehumanized another human being enough to engage in these practices; they come back as a damaged person as well.” She mentioned how personnel involved in torture sometimes have difficulty transitioning back into their communities. What do you think is the impact of torture on its participants? What is the impact of torture on their wider community? What can the faith community do to heal the wounds created by torture?
7. We heard from a former military interrogator, Matthew Alexander, that the use of torture is actually counter-productive in gaining useful intelligence because the use of torture makes others angry and inspires them to fight against the United States. The only successful way to obtain information is through relationship building and ethical approaches, not through brutality. How do you feel about the fact that we have used torture despite its proven liabilities?
8. As Hollywood uses creative license to depict graphic torture scenes in movies like *Zero Dark Thirty*, many believe their claims. The facts about torture, gathered by the Senate Intelligence Committee, have shown that torture in fact did not provide key intelligence leading us to Osama bin Laden. Rather, torture produced false leads that wasted valuable time. Do you think that popular entertainment like *Zero Dark Thirty* or *24* encourages Americans to believe that torture is justified? How do you think depictions of torture in movies or T.V. shows such as these impact our values as a society?
9. Rev. Steve Martin discusses the need for people to know the facts about torture - not just the fiction depicted in *Zero Dark Thirty*. He emphasizes the importance of releasing the 6,000 page report adopted by the Senate Intelligence Committee in December 2012, which concludes that torture was ineffective and did not provide the information that led to Osama bin Laden. Do you think public opinion will be swayed through release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report? If the report is released, do you believe there is a special role for the religious community in ensuring that torture never happens again?

Distribution of the NRCAT statement “A Call for the Facts” and Closing (5 minutes)

Please distribute copies of NRCAT’s statement “A Call for the Facts” and ask those who wish to sign it to do so. NRCAT will send the petitions collected to President Obama.

End with a closing prayer or the way that your class typically closes its session.

Definition of Torture

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) uses the definition of torture included in Article I of the U.N Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Convention came into force on June 26, 1987, following ratification by the 20th nation. June 26th is now recognized as the UN International Day in Support of Torture Victims.

The Convention was signed by the U.S. in 1988 and ratified by the U.S. Congress in 1994, thereby becoming U.S. law.

Here is the definition of torture from Article I of the Convention:

“For the purposes of this Convention, the term ‘torture’ means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.”

The Convention against Torture also prohibits cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment which does not amount to torture.

Mail Petition to:

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

110 Maryland Ave., NE, Suite 502; Washington, DC 20002

**A CALL FOR THE FACTS
A Statement by People of Faith**

Torture is a moral abomination. It runs contrary to the teachings of all religions and is an egregious violation of the dignity and worth God gives to every human being including torture's victims and perpetrators. Torture is always wrong.

Zero Dark Thirty, a critically acclaimed film that will be seen by millions of people, falsely implies that the use of torture by U.S. authorities provided intelligence that led to Osama bin Laden. *Zero Dark Thirty* is fiction.

The Senate Intelligence Committee recently adopted, with a bipartisan vote, a more than 6,000 page report on the CIA's use of torture. The report is the result of a three-year investigation and is based on information about the detainee interrogation program contained in millions of pages of documents. This report contains the facts about torture.

The public needs the facts about torture in order to understand fully that torture is morally wrong, illegal, and ineffective and to ensure that torture never happens again. We call on the Senate Intelligence Committee to release its report to the public as soon as possible.

Name — PLEASE PRINT	E-mail*	City & State	ZIP Code

** Thank you for your support. When you provide your email address, we'll add you to our mailing list to receive regular updates on ways to make your voice heard for a torture-free future. You can unsubscribe at any time.*

Mail Petition to:

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

110 Maryland Ave., NE, Suite 502; Washington, DC 20002

**YES, ADD MY NAME ON THE PETITION
A CALL FOR THE FACTS**

Name — PLEASE PRINT	E-mail*	City & State	ZIP Code

** Thank you for your support. When you provide your email address, we'll add you to our mailing list to receive regular updates on ways to make your voice heard for a torture-free future. You can unsubscribe at any time.*