

NATIONAL RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN AGAINST TORTURE

“Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever”

Transcript

DR. DAVID GUSHEE, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University: It’s not just a legal issue; it’s not just a security issue. It’s a moral issue because it has to do with how human beings are treated.

LINDA GUSTITUS, President, Board of Directors, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: It was allowed to continue. It wasn’t stopped, even though Congress and the American people knew about it.

DR. GEORGE HUNSINGER, Founder, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: Will the American people realize what is happening and be able to rise up against it and reclaim the rule of law?

WORDS ON SCREEN: In early 2002, the United States moved toward a policy of torturing prisoners in the “War on Terror.”

LINDA GUSTITUS, President, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: Had the American people said “no” to torture, had Congress said “no” to torture, the policy and the program would have had to have stopped.

WORDS ON SCREEN: Today torture is banned, but many Americans don’t think it’s wrong.

DR. KAREN J. GREENBERG, Director, Center on National Security, Fordham University School of Law: And these new techniques included nakedness, hooding, long periods of isolation, the use of dogs to threaten individuals, and other techniques, exposures to hot and cold.

WORDS ON SCREEN: Do those close to you see torture as a moral issue?

MATTHEW ALEXANDER, Military Interrogator: If we use torture/abuse to get information to stop and save lives, that Al Qaeda will turn around and use that to recruit new fighters and it’d be counterproductive in the long run. And we knew that because every day in our prison there were foreign fighters who were telling us that the number one reason they decided to come to Iraq and join the Jihad and fight against us was because of torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.

WORDS ON SCREEN: Does torture make us more secure or less? Torture is always wrong.

REV. RICHARD KILLMER, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: We have to grow the moral consensus among all American people that torture is always wrong. We can codify that and make that a part of law, and that’s extremely important. But it needs to be a part of our hearts and our souls that this is what we believe as American people, that torture is always wrong, without exceptions - it’s just never possible.

WORDS ON SCREEN: Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever: a study for people of faith by National Religious Campaign Against Torture

LINDA GUSTITUS, President, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: I have always been a very patriotic and proud American. I love talking to young people about government. I'm always pushing public service for people and how important it is to serve your country; what a blessing it is to live in America; what America means to the rest of the world. And so I think that's really where my passion on this issue comes from, because it's of all of the issues, I mean, what you can't have any argument for is the United States engaging in torture. I mean, there are three acts that are completely illegal in any country in the world under international law for which there can be no exceptions. There are no circumstances under which you can commit these practices as civilized people and that's slavery, genocide, and torture.

WORDS ON SCREEN: slavery, genocide, torture

DR. STEPHEN COLECCHI, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: In Catholic teaching something that is intrinsically evil is something that can never be done under any circumstance. Torture is intrinsically evil because under no circumstances can it be justified because it violates the life and dignity of the human person. In fact it not only violates the dignity of the victim – the immediate victim – but also violates the dignity of the perpetrator. And it violates the integrity of the society within which we live because any society that tolerates an action such as torture is a society that's toying with something intrinsically evil that will be corrosive to the society as a whole and will break down trust between people. It will make the world a less safe place for all of us.

DR. GEORGE HUNSINGER, Founder, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: I've known for a long time that there was this very troubling aspect to our government. This is not a political issue. This is not just about any particular administration. This is about torture. This is about torture, which is never justified.

ORLANDO TIZON, Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition: I am a survivor of torture. I was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured in 1982 during the Marcos dictatorship. And I was in prison for four years, and those four years changed my whole life. I would say the whole trajectory of my life was entirely changed.

STEPHEN XENAKIS, M.D., Brigadier General (Ret.), United States Army: Right from the time of the Revolutionary War, clearly stated by George Washington, we will not abuse, treat inhumanely any prisoners that our army takes, even though - even at that time - the Hessians had in fact abused American prisoners. So it's from the beginning, the American military, it has been established that we will not take any action that looks like torture.

WORDS ON SCREEN: Torture is against our values

SCOTT HORTON: Contributing Editor, Harper's Magazine: We have to note that you know; it was a matter of military policy for 200 years – more than 200 years – but then it also became a

matter of law – Congress passed a law, the Anti-Torture Act, that made it a felony to resort to torture.

DR. SAYYID SYEED: Islamic Society of North America: You know that I come from India. I have opted for American citizenship. I have chosen it for me, because I believe that America is a model for the rest of the world. So therefore it is more frustrating for me if I hear news where I see that we are falling short of those standards.

DR. GEORGE HUNSINGER: And torture is that form of lawlessness which undermines everything that a constitutional government, the Magna Carta, and Habeas Corpus and so on stands for.

RABBI BRIAN WALT, Reform Temple of Thiaca, NY: It's an issue about the soul of America. What is America, you know? Who are Americans? What do we stand for?

WORDS ON SCREEN: Interrogation Prior to 9-11

SCOTT HORTON, Contributing Editor, Harper's Magazine: The American approach in interrogation was, I think, it was subtle, sophisticated. It involved learning the adversary's culture and his language; and engaging him, but not using physical force or brutality in any way. And these techniques actually were extremely effective, more effective than the techniques that were used by the Nazis or the Japanese that involved using torture. Those were techniques that broke people certainly, but they really rarely get actionable intelligence out of them.

DR. DAVID P. GUSHEE, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University: The military for awhile and the CIA for one reason or another lost confidence in traditional interrogation techniques that had been developed over a long period of time. And so borrowing from a variety of sources, including we now know North Korean interrogation techniques, the techniques that were used and are used on our troops – some of them at least who are undergoing basic training and having to learn how to deal with scenarios that might happen when or if they are captured.

MATTHEW ALEXANDER, Military Interrogator: I arrived in March of 2006 that was at the height of the civil war, and the height of the violence that was happening. Suicide bombings were a daily occurrence. The body count was unbelievable. Every morning you would wake up and there would be bodies lying all over the country as a result of the reprisal killings by Shia militia and also the retaliation by Sunni insurgent groups.

People talk hypothetically about a ticking time bomb. But we lived the ticking time bomb every day. We were dealing with suicide bombers. We often captured people just after suicide bombers had left their houses to conduct missions. In the case of one person I talked about in my book, a man named Abu Ali, he had been caught right after he had finished blessing suicide bombers who went out for a mission in Baghdad.

So we were against the ticking time bomb literally. You can have an interrogation that's intense, emotionally, for a detainee, but it can be ethical. In the case of intelligence interrogations, I can

come up with all types of techniques that I know from a criminal background that are very intense, but they're ethical. I'm never going to cross the line and go into coercion. I'm never going to threaten somebody. I'm never going to humiliate or use torture or abuse. I'm going to bring out their emotions and convince them to cooperate with me in a good way in a spirit of cooperation and negotiation. This is the one place where we meet our enemy face to face in the battlefield and get to talk to them, and we have to do that in a spirit of cooperation and negotiation if we're going to be successful.

WORDS AND PICTURE ON THE SCREEN: Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi; leader of Al-Qaida in Iraq; killed by coalition forces in 2006.

Our biggest catch to date in the war on terror is Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi. And we caught him using non-coercive techniques using relationship-building techniques, using our intellect, using compassion, sometimes offering deals to people to work with us, but they had nothing to do with the techniques that are shown on shows like "24." It was just the opposite.

REV. STEVEN D. MARTIN, New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good: Members of the Senate Intelligence Committee have publicly refuted the idea that torture provided critical intelligence in the hunt for bin Laden. Senator McCain, in fact, directly criticized the movie "Zero Dark Thirty," saying that the filmmakers fell hook, line and sinker for a false narrative about how the United States obtained intelligence to track down bin Laden.

MATTHEW ALEXANDER: And I understand that's Hollywood, and it's art, and they can put what they want inside art, but I want people to know that the reality—those of us who have been on the ground and had to interrogate high level members of Al Qaeda who are committed to their cause—we achieved success by using relationship-building approaches, not by using brutality.

WORDS ON SCREEN: Torture is a moral issue

RABBI GERRY SEROTTA, Executive Director, Clergy Beyond Borders: Jewish tradition has a lot to say about it, and sadly Jews have also experienced torture throughout our history, but the basic element why we're opposed to torture in any form whatsoever is the idea that human beings are created in the image of God. We shouldn't say – the Talmud says this – don't say that just because you've been dishonored, you can dishonor your fellow human being. Remember that that human being is created in the image of God. God created him that way, and if you dishonor a human being, you're actually dishonoring God.

DR. STEPHEN COLECCHI, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: In general, Catholic teaching believes that the human person is both sacred and social. And the human person is sacred because they're created in the image and likeness of God; and in Christ, every person has been offered salvation. And so the human person has a value that doesn't come because of their position in life, it doesn't come from how much money they have or how much prestige they can command. It comes from the very fact that they're a child of God, that they're created in the image of God.

DR. SAYYID SYEED, Islamic Society of North America: First and foremost in the Qur'an, and the sayings of the Prophet, Prophet Mohammed, emphasize is the fundamental right, the right – the right to dignity for human beings. The Qur'an is very clear. There is a verse in the Qur'an which says that God created man and invested him with inherent dignity. So it's our duty to make sure that it is not in any way – any human being is not put through a process which is undignified, humiliating, and existentially and physically resorts to torture. So a Muslim is prohibited from torturing, not just a human being, but any living creature.

REV. RICHARD KILLMER, Executive Director, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: For the religious community, for the three Abrahamic faiths –Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—and for other religions as well—human beings have a specialness. The Abrahamic religions define it as being created in the image of God. So that violations against human beings are really a violation against God. And so when you see human beings and hence God being violated in that way it just has developed a huge commitment by many people that this just has to end.

DR. DAVID GUSHEE, Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University: Issues can simultaneously be policy issues, security issues, military issues, and moral issues. And I join the many others in this country who believe that it's all of that—that torture is a moral issue and it violates principles of basic justice and humanity, and from a deeper religious perspective, a Christian perspective, it's the most unloving thing you can do to a person. It's hateful, and contemptuous, and therefore contemptible.

WORDS ON SCREEN: victims of torture

SCOTT HORTON, Contributing Editor, Harpers Magazine: There are two victims of torture when it is practiced. There is the person to whom it is physically applied, and there is the person who is administering the techniques. That person also is morally compromised and that person may in fact suffer severely and psychologically as a result of the torture techniques. And so when a government says we want you to apply these techniques and do these things, they are inflicting very severe psychological damage on the person they're instructing to carry out these techniques.

In fact, when we look at this War on Terror, there are three separate cases that I've been studying involving stellar U.S. personnel – one an Army colonel, one an interrogation sergeant, and another, a junior officer, each of whom committed suicide and left behind notes saying that they had been required to do things in the course of their service – and each of them had been involved in some of these interrogations – that they could not reconcile with their conscience and they decided to end their life on the basis of this.

GITA GUTIERREZ: Attorney, formerly at Center for Constitutional Rights: When we go in and do these things that our country has long recognized that these kinds of methods are torture and they're illegal, when we have seen American POW's held by North Korea subjected to the same kind of sleep deprivation, isolation, we have without hesitation called that torture and asked for those people who perpetrated it to be prosecuted or held accountable.

And we have maintained that within all of our military engagements. We've had very, very clear lines of what constitutes torture and impermissible interrogation methods. And in part it's because we don't want that to be reciprocated against our soldiers and our servicemen and women.

I'd also say that as a human being that when we dehumanize someone enough to engage in torture, we dehumanize ourselves. The torturer is dehumanized, and there's damage from that that reverberates throughout an entire community.

When someone who is a victim of torture goes back into their community, their relationship with their spouse is damaged, their relationship with their children, and their relationship with their community. And it has a fall-out that can potentially create more violence and pain in a community.

When a torturer comes home, when someone who has numbed themselves enough and dehumanized another human being enough to engage in these practices, they come back a damaged person as well.

And many of the American personnel who've been involved in interrogations, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, have come back and had very troubling – very troubled re-entries into the US, and are just now starting to speak out about the help they need, the regret they feel, the distance they're experiencing with their own spouse and families, their inability to casually re-enter American society after having stepped over to the dark side, and trying to come back into the country.

So on many levels, torture may happen in a single place, in a single incident, but then it stays with us and it stays with the larger community just than the people involved.

ORLANDO TIZON, Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition: I would say that the symptoms are minimized a little but they are still there, really. I don't think I will completely recover. I still get bad dreams. I still get nightmares. There are still nights when I don't get a good night's sleep because of some incident during the day. It could be something that happened at work, it could be something that just happened, or something that you hear on the radio that could trigger these things and things come back. And so I have learned to live with this and I try to live as much as I can and make the best of that.

DR. GEORGE HUNSINGER, Founder, National Religious Campaign Against Torture: There's a picture I see all of the time, maybe not everybody sees it, it's of Guantanamo. It's got these guys kneeling down. They've got orange uniforms on. They're hooded, they are, their sight and their ears are blocked out, they're chained in a kneeling position to the ground. The guards are looking over them. We're witnessing torture; multiple forms of torture: sensory deprivation, stress positions, in combination break a person mentally and emotionally when used over time. These techniques are always used in combination, never just one alone. And the perpetrators who inflict this kind of mental pain and anguish on people and the people who undergo it are both damaged for life.

Torture does not end when the torture session ends. And people who have been tortured – even if they can begin to live some semblance of a normal life – they keep struggling with it and very often in the end they take their lives.

DR. STEPHEN COLECCHI, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: I think it's just a risk that's far too great to take. The greater risk is always that we will accept torture and it will become part of who we are and then we will be less than fully human.

REV. STEVEN D. MARTIN, New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good: Millions of people will see the award winning movie "Zero Dark Thirty," about the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden, and many will leave the theatre thinking that the use of torture produced important intelligence. That is false. The American people deserve the facts about torture, and those facts are contained in a 6,000 page report recently adopted in a bipartisan vote by the Senate Intelligence Committee. That report, according to senators familiar with its findings, reveals that torture was harmful to our national security and did not provide us with the intelligence leading us to bin Laden. The Senate Intelligence Committee should make that report public.

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RABBI WALT: I wish I didn't know it — now that I know it, I have to do something. I have to.

WORDS ON SCREEN: What Can You Do?

Go online to send an email to your senator or the President urging the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on CIA torture.

Sign NRCAT's statement, "A Call for The Facts – A Statement by People of Faith"
Urge other congregations and organizations to show this video.

www.nrcat.org/factnotfiction

Voice over of Steve Martin: Join the National Religious Campaign Against Torture in urging the Senate Intelligence Committee to release their report on torture. The American people want and need the facts about torture.

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