2008 has been a significant year of growth for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT). This report describes NRCAT’s work during of the calendar year of 2008 and has several sections:

- History and goals
- Deepening and broadening the involvement of the religious community in anti-torture work.
- The program of NRCAT designed to educate and to increase the commitment of people of faith across the nation.
- Efforts to impact legislation that would end U.S.-sponsored torture.

**History**

Dr. George Hunsinger, a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, provided leadership for a faith-based conference on the issue of U.S.-sponsored torture held in January 2006 in Princeton, NJ. During that conference, attended by 150 leaders of a variety of faiths, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) was launched. The Churches’ Center for Theology and Public Policy (CCTPP), a national ecumenical research center located in Washington, D.C., and the Peace Action Education Fund of Princeton, New Jersey, helped plan the conference and create NRCAT.

The Churches’ Center staffed NRCAT from January 2006 to May 7, 2007 and, in June 2006, became its fiscal agent. NRCAT incorporated in March 2007 in the District of Columbia and was granted its 501(c) (3) by the IRS in June 2007. On May 7, 2007, NRCAT hired Rev. Richard Killmer as its executive director and additional staff people were hired later in 2007 and 2008. There is a Board of Directors of nine people responsible for its work.

NRCAT is a 501 (c)(3) organization which has an “h” election so that it is able to spend up to 20% of its expenditures on lobbying. In December 2007, the NRCAT Action Fund, the (c)(4), was created. It does lobbying and election campaign activities like urging people of faith to ask candidates for president, the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives questions about torture.
NRCAT currently has six permanent staff: Executive Director, Director for Administration, Director for Policy Coordination, Director for Program Coordination, an Executive Assistant, and the Project Manager for Evangelicals for Human Rights. It has also hired contract staff for several of its projects and several interns.

NRCAT’s fund raising efforts have been successful. $758,111 was raised in 2008 from foundations, religious organizations, large donors and individual people of faith.

NRCAT saw the fruit of its many efforts on January 22, 2009 when President Barack Obama signed an Executive Order halting torture just two days after taking the Oath of Office. NRCAT’s concerted efforts to engage the nation’s faith communities and build the moral consensus against torture were probably in this historic moment.

Despite President Obama’s halting torture, there is much more to be done to change U.S. policies governing the treatment of individuals caught up in the ‘war on terror’ and to end government-sanctioned torture once and for all. Therefore, our overarching goal for the remainder of 2009 is to complete the work that President Obama started with his executive order by ensuring the passage of legislation that will make the President’s halt to U.S.-sponsored torture permanent.

**Goals**

The goals of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture are to:

1. Bring about changes in U.S. policy to prohibit -- without exception -- all U.S.-sponsored torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees, including all policies that allow for or encourage such torture or treatment. These changes must:
   - Prohibit any exemption from or exception to U.S. adherence to the human rights standards of international law – without exception;
   - Prohibit the practice of apprehending suspects and transporting them to countries that use torture as an interrogation technique;
   - Prohibit the existence or use of secret prisons for U.S. detainees anywhere in the world;
   - Mandate access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to all U.S. detainees around the world;
   - Restore habeas corpus protection for all U.S. detainees, citizen and non-citizen alike;
   - Prohibit the use of evidence derived from torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment (including hearsay evidence) in the determination of guilt or innocence of a charged offense;

2. Expand the moral consensus among the American people that torture is never acceptable.

3. Encourage and enable national denominations, faith groups, national and regional religious organizations, congregations, and individual people of faith to engage actively in efforts to end U.S.-sponsored torture.
Key Programs and Accomplishments

Google includes 138,000 entries for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. The organization not only has engaged in significant program activities, but has grown its infrastructure so that it is well-prepared to continue to work toward its goal of ending U.S.-sponsored torture.

NRCAT’s key programs and accomplishments, since its genesis in January 2006, can be viewed within a framework of three broad objectives:

I. Deepening and broadening the involvement of the religious community in anti-torture work.

II. Providing programmatic opportunities to the religious community, especially congregations, for addressing this issue.

III. Working to have an influence on anti-torture public policy before the U.S. Congress and the President of the United States. This includes providing opportunities to individuals and institutions of faith to urge their Members of Congress and the President to support anti-torture measures.

I. Deepening and broadening the involvement of the religious community in anti-torture work.

1. There are now over 250 religious organizations that are members of NRCAT. These include: evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, mainline Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, Bahá’ís, and Buddhists. Over 90 of those are Participating Members that name a representative to the Participating Members Council (PMC) and contribute financially to the organization. NRCAT sends emails often to its member religious organizations with information to send to their constituents about legislation and suggestions for engaging their congregations in the effort to end torture.

The religious organizations are: national denominational and faith group bodies, regional entities like state ecumenical agencies, congregations and other local religious organizations.

2. There are over 40,000 people of faith who have endorsed “Torture is a Moral Issue” – NRCAT’s Statement of Conscience or the Declaration of principles for a presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty. Endorsers are important partners of the organization receiving information about pending legislation in Congress as well as suggestions for helping their congregations engage in efforts to end torture.

3. There are six interfaith regional anti-torture organizations that are participating members of NRCAT and have a close working relationship with it. Five of these were formed in conjunction with or because of NRCAT’s work. These include: Washington Region Religious Campaign Against Torture, Metro New York Religious Campaign Against Torture, Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice in Connecticut, the Bay Area Religious Campaign Against Torture in California, Washington State Religious Campaign Against Torture and Chester County (PA) Religious Campaign Against Torture.
4. NRCAT has a special relationship with several anti-torture faith-based organizations. These include: Evangelicals for Human Rights (which NRCAT created), Rabbis for Human Rights – North America, and No2Torture (a Presbyterian group). NRCAT has also developed the Roman Catholic Leadership Council which has prepared study material for Catholic parishes. Their work is described below. All four entities are linked to the NRCAT Partners button on the web site homepage.

5. NRCAT created Evangelicals for Human Rights (EHR) and continues to serve as its fiscal agent. EHR is in its third year of existence. The EHR Steering Committee has 12 members that provide EHR with inroads into the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), Fuller Theological Seminary, Sojourners, and the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC). EHR has also continued to strengthen its relationship with the National Association of Evangelicals. See below for a description of the major conference, Religious Faith, Torture, and our National Soul to which EHR provided leadership.

6. NRCAT has enabled national denominations and faith groups to work to end U.S.-sponsored torture. It has done so in several ways, including providing these bodies with concrete programs that congregations can implement as well as opportunities to influence legislation by providing information and advocacy materials related to bills before the U.S. Congress.

NRCAT has also had a presence at the national gatherings of national denominational and faith group bodies. These include: the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, three conventions of the Islamic Society of North America, two conferences of Rabbis for Human Rights – North America, the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, and the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

NRCAT has created opportunities for the legislative staff of national denominational bodies to urge Members of Congress to support torture-related legislation by organizing interfaith anti-torture lobbying days and providing the background materials.

7. NRCAT has worked with state ecumenical and interfaith bodies. There are ten state ecumenical agencies that are members of NRCAT.

In December, 2007, the NRCAT Action Fund secured funding for four state ecumenical agencies to develop projects to urge their senators to support the provision in the Intelligence Authorization bill that would require the intelligence agencies, including the CIA, to follow the U.S. Army Field manual in carrying out interrogations of detainees. The ecumenical agencies were: the South Carolina Christian Action Council, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches and the New Hampshire Council of Churches. The projects included encouraging and enabling faith leaders to contact their Senators, to write letters to the editor and provide op-eds in their local newspapers, and to meet with their Senators' staff on this issue. Several other state ecumenical agencies, which did not receive funding, were also engaged in this effort.

In the fall of 2008, NRCAT recruited six state ecumenical agencies (MN, PA, SC, OR, NC and NH) to support the bill to require that the International Committee of the Red Cross have access
to all U.S.-held detainees. NRCAT provided information about the issue, as well as advocacy materials (fact sheets, sample letters to the editors, sample op-eds, sample sign-on letters, etc.). The state ecumenical agencies worked with faith leaders from within their states to lobby their Senators on the issue. See the report on this legislation at the end of this report.

Several state ecumenical and interfaith bodies provided additional key support for NRCAT campaigns in 2008. By encouraging congregations to display banners during June, taking the lead in the Editorial Board project, and helping to organize congressional visits and public events for the November 12th National Day of Witness, these organizations helped to extend the reach of our national efforts and to build grassroots capacity and local visibility. More than half the recipients of NRCAT’s small grants in 2008 were state ecumenical and interfaith bodies.

II. Providing programmatic opportunities to the religious community, especially congregations, for addressing this issue.

1. Banner Project

NRCAT made June 2008, “Torture Awareness Month” the month for Banners Across America! More than 330 congregations in all 50 states and DC displayed anti-torture banners on the exterior of their buildings during that month. We continued promoting banners through the remainder of year, and eventually had more than 350 participating congregations. Most of the messages say “torture is wrong” or “Torture is a Moral Issue”. Rabbis for Human Rights recruited more than 25 synagogues to participate in this project.

On [http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=152&Itemid=151](http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=152&Itemid=151), the NRCAT web site there are photographs of many of the banners, a list of over 100 press stories about the banners and a list of the banner congregations by states. During the summer, we produced a colorful poster including many of the photographs. In September and October, NRCAT delivered one poster to all members of Congress (and in 2009 delivered one to the White House). In several states, local congregations organized delegations to deliver a copy of the poster to local congressional offices as part of a legislative advocacy visit. The posters are available for purchase on NRCAT’s online store.

Many congregations continued to display their banners through the end of the year. Others took them down for a period of time and then displayed them again in November, in conjunction with our National Day of Witness for a Presidential Executive Order to Ban Torture, and in January before and after the inauguration. Many have used their banners for special events, including public processions and vigils.

2. Work to urge a Presidential Executive Order

NRCAT joined with two other organizations, Evangelicals for Human Rights and the Center for Victims of Torture to generate support for an executive order by the President of the United States implementing a [Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty](http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=152&Itemid=151). The three organizations organized the Campaign to Ban torture and prepared the Declaration of Principles.
Phase One (October 2007 through March 2008) was marked by development of strategies for implementing the project and the preparation of the Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty. During this phase the three organizations vetted the concept of this proposal and drafts of the Declaration with many in the religious and foreign policy, military, and security communities. After agreeing upon a final draft, each organization began to collect endorsements from leaders in their target communities and garnered 200 of them.

The Declaration was endorsed by three former Secretaries of Defense; three former Secretaries of State including George Schultz; three former National Security Advisors; more than 60 Evangelical leaders, including Rich Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals and Gary Haugen of International Justice Mission; and nearly 60 other religious leaders including Bishop Thomas Wenski, Chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches, Rabbi Steve Gutow, Executive Director, Jewish Council of Public Affairs; Dr. Ingrid Mattson, president of the Islamic Society of North America; and 18 executive directors of state ecumenical agencies. Additionally, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. has endorsed the Declaration.

Phase Two (April 2008 to October 2008) featured a public launch in June 2008, followed by a major grass roots campaign in all 50 states to collect endorsements from individual people of faith and religious institutions.

The three organizations launched the public phase of the Campaign on June 25, 2008, with a press conference that featured the release of the names of more than 200 senior level endorsers. The public launch received extensive media coverage, including an exclusive article granted to the New York Times that was reprinted in the Denver Post, Seattle Times, International Herald Tribune, and Military.com. The Wall Street Journal and Christian Science Monitor also covered the launch, as did the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Minnesota Daily. Opinion pieces, co-authored by faith and military leaders, appeared in the Orlando Sentinel, Richmond Times-Dispatch, and St. Paul Pioneer Press. The Associated Press, Inter Press Service, United Press International and Catholic News Service posted stories that were picked up by a number of regional publications. On-line postings included the Washington Post, ABC News, MSNBC, Chicago Tribune, Huffington Post, and nine other news sites or blogs. Television coverage included MSNBC and CSPAN3.

The grassroots strategy involved outreach through NRCAT’s member groups and allied organizations to secure more than 15,000 endorsements by individual people of faith and more than 100 endorsements by religious organizations and institutions. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) endorsed the Declaration of Principles one day after the press conference launching the Campaign to Ban Torture.

One of the most useful tools was an informational brochure designed as a bulletin insert. NRCAT distributed these colorful bulletin inserts to all of the congregations that displayed an anti-torture banner and were available through our online store for less than the cost of shipping. NRCAT also produced the Declaration in petition format, so that volunteers could gather endorsements at worship services and in public places. The Bay Area Religious Campaign
Against Torture (BARCAT) reached agreement with the manager of a supermarket to allow them to gather endorsements outside the store, and they found that to be a very successful venue. The Washington State Religious Campaign Against Torture (WSRCAT) used a series of public events, as well as a signature drive in local congregations to gather more than 2300 endorsements. NRCAT also developed a web sticker that enabled our member groups and allies to encourage people to endorse the Declaration of Principles via their websites.

NRCAT and the other partner organizations also held initial meeting with staff for both major party candidates for President to brief them on the Declaration of Principles and to begin to lay the groundwork for gathering their support post-election.

Phase Three (November 2008 to January 2009) marked a shift to post-election efforts to convince political leaders and high level staff to encourage the newly elected President to issue an Executive Order ending torture upon his assumption of the office of the presidency. The primary goal of this phase, of course, was to convince the President’s advisors and other senior administrative officials of the political, moral, and practical value of taking such an action. Our strategies for doing so involved local grassroots organizing, lobbying Members of Congress, and high-level contacts with members of the transition team.

On Wednesday, November 12th, during the week following the election, NRCAT organized a “National Day of Witness for an Executive Order to Ban Torture.” This highly successful event involved more than 50 delegations of religious leaders and people of faith in more than 25 states, meeting with Members of Congress or their staff to seek their support for an executive order based upon the Declaration of Principles and their help urging the President-elect to issue an executive order during his first days in office. In addition, more than 30 religious institutions participated in a moving procession and public witness in front of the White House. The procession and public witness included hundreds of people of faith, many of whom carried anti-torture banners that had been displayed outside their places of worship.

The local events, combined with a national press teleconference featuring prominent interfaith religious leaders, resulted in more than 50 media stories in the days following the Day of Witness. A Reuters story was picked up around the globe. A press release issued by Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ) endorsed the Declaration of Principles and received significant coverage, as well. In the end, only a handful of Members of Congress publicly endorsed the Declaration, but this strategy provided an effective means for communicating our message, strengthening our grassroots leadership (at least a third of the delegation leaders had never before visited a congressional office), and building relationships with both in-district and Washington-based congressional staff. Further, this strategy helped build support in Congress for the possibility of codifying elements of the Declaration of Principles into law.

In January, NRCAT launched one final grassroots effort to unite the religious community in calling for President-elect Obama to issue an executive order ending torture. Called “Countdown to End Torture: Ten Days of Prayer,” this initiative featured a “countdown clock” on the website, marking the final 10 days before the inauguration, and a call to religious congregations to include an interfaith prayer on torture in a worship service during that period. More than 200 congregations informed us of their participation in the Countdown initiative.
During this same period, NRCAT’s leadership engaged in a number of high-level efforts to demonstrate to the Transition Team the importance of an executive order based on the Declaration. NRCAT convinced nearly three dozen prominent religious leaders, representing the diversity of America’s faith traditions, to sign letter to President-elect Obama calling on him to end torture. On Wednesday, January 14th, NRCAT organized a national press teleconference involving some of these religious leaders and two representatives of the intelligence community to highlight the “Countdown to End Torture”. On the same day, 17 NRCAT staff, board and religious leaders met with members of the Transition Team to deliver the signed letter and the list of people of faith who had endorsed the Declaration of Principles. NRCAT followed up two days later, on Friday, January 16th, with an interfaith phone call to again re-iterate to the transition team the importance of the executive order. On the day of the phone call, the press began publishing stories claiming that the President-elect was considering the possibility of allowing the CIA to use secret interrogation techniques from a “classified annex” – NRCAT leaders were able to immediately tell the transition team that that would be a mistake.

Media coverage for the “Countdown to End Torture” activities was extraordinary. Among the more than 50 stories were 3 mentions of NRCAT in the New York Times within a one week period. One Associated Press story was picked up by at least 8 publications, and other significant stories appeared in the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune, USA Today, US News & World Report, and a wide variety of religious news services.

All of our efforts were richly rewarded when the President signed an executive order halting the use of torture on January 22, 2009, just 48 hours after his inauguration. While much work remains to bring a complete and permanent end to U.S.-sponsored torture, NRCAT has encouraged its member groups and allies to take the time to give thanks for this momentous change in policy. In addition to encouraging its supporters to thank the White House directly (and providing them with sample emails with which to do so), NRCAT has also provided an interfaith “Prayer of Thanksgiving” and other resources for congregations that wanted to mark this occasion during worship services.

3. Grants for Regional Work

During 2008, NRCAT provided small grants to strengthen the efforts of state and regional religious organizations, as well as two national organizations that have been close partners in this work. In March, NRCAT awarded capacity-building grants (ranging from $2000 to $5000) to six organizations in six different states for a total of $25,000. The local work undertaken with these funds included outreach and base-building, organizing a weekend conference, and organizing a series of interfaith programs with films and public speakers.

In August, NRCAT provided another round of small grants to support local organizing as part of our fall organizing campaign. Five of these grants (ranging from $2500 to $4000) went to state and regional religious organizations, while two $5000 grants supported the efforts of two national partners to encourage local organizing among their constituencies across the country.

Together, these thirteen small grants had a major impact on our grassroots organizing in 2008. The groups supported by these grants organized more than a dozen public events, secured the participation of religious leaders in local delegations visiting key congressional offices, produced
at least twenty local news stories and provided the diversity of religious and geographical participation that led to national news coverage for our work.

4. “24” - The FOX Television Program

One of the most disturbing realities is the way torture has come to be seen as normal. One obvious example of this reality is the way torture is depicted on primetime television. Prior to 2001, an average season depicted 4 instances of torture and when they were, almost without exception, it was portrayed as immoral. Now an average broadcast season broadcast shows depicts 127 instances of torture, most of which the overwhelming majority are being committed by the protagonists. (Statistics from Human Rights First)

With leadership from No2Torture working with the Presbyterian Church (USA), NRCAT helped create a delegation of senior national religious leaders to meet with executives and writers at Fox Entertainment to begin a conversation with the goal of influencing the way torture is portrayed. FOX was chosen because of ubiquity and egregiousness of torture depicted on the show “24” and its enormous popularity. The conversation was superb and the writers and producers seemed very open to the concerns of the senior religious leaders.

5. Heads of Denominations and Faith Groups

NRCAT has worked with a variety of groups within the religious community to end U.S.-sponsored torture. One of these groups has been the heads of faith groups. A major request to this group has been to sign letters and endorse statements.

There are now 30 heads of denominations and faith groups that have endorsed NRCAT’s Statement of Conscience “Torture is a Moral Issue”. The list continues to grow and can be viewed at http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17&Itemid=46.

In addition there were these letters:

- Twenty eight heads of faith groups and other senior religious leaders endorsed Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty – asking the President to issue an executive order ending torture.
- Twenty seven signed a letter to the Senate asking their support for legislation which would have guaranteed the International Committee of the Red Cross access to U.S.-held detainees.
- Thirty four asked President-elect Obama to issue an executive order ending torture
- Thirty three said thank you to President Obama for issuing the executive order.

6. “Religious Faith, Torture, and Our National Soul” Conference

On September 11-12, 2008, Evangelicals for Human Rights, with NRCAT and Mercer University as the main sponsors, hosted a national summit on torture to look at how the United States made the descent into torture, and how we can move out of it. This event was to be infused with moral conviction drawn from religious faith, and conference speakers reflected a variety of faith perspectives. Religious Faith, Torture, and our National Soul sought to model an interfaith discourse that opens doors for dialogue rather than closes them.
Questions that were considered:

- What policy decisions led to torture?
- What does torture do to human beings?
- What is really going on at Guantanamo Bay?
- How do we heal the (American) Christian relationship with the Muslim world?
- What legislative efforts are being made to address torture?
- How do Christians break free from cultural captivity?
- What are younger thinkers noticing about this cultural moment that others are missing?
- How do we restore America's leadership in protecting human rights?

There were 14 co-sponsors of the conference. These not only included evangelical organizations like the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Evangelicals for Social Action, and Sojourners, but Rabbis for Human Rights and the Islamic Society of North America. A number of sponsoring organizations already had a relationship with EHR previous to the coordinating of the conference, such as the Center for Victims of Torture and Faith in Public Life, but many new relationships have been formed as the result of co-sponsoring this event. EHR is now working with Third Way, Morehouse College, Faith and the City, and Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and our good work with these groups began in planning the national summit on torture. In addition to these national religious and human rights organizations, EHR has also begun to build bridges with churches and non-profit organizations in Atlanta and the South. We are optimistic that the alliances we build now will increase the support for anti-torture policy and advocacy in the southern United States.

The list of speakers at the conference was also impressive, with over 50 speakers from all over the country. 22 of them were evangelical, while the rest of the speakers represented Jewish, Quaker, Mainline Christian, Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, and Muslim traditions. These men and women are among the nation’s most prominent attorneys, clergy, activists, and scholars in the field of torture and human rights. For a complete list of speakers, along with brief bios, go to http://www.evangelicalsforhumanrights.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=75&Itemid=110.

243 registrants came from 22 states and Washington, DC, to participate in the 2 day conference. Over half of the participants were from southern states, and the majority of registrants were evangelicals. Students from 20 different universities, seminaries, and graduate programs attended. In addition to the people in the auditorium in Atlanta, the conference was also available on EHR’s website, and roughly an additional 300 viewers watched sessions live.

In addition to the sessions themselves, which remain available online (click here to view any session in its entirety), a number of other important resources came out of the conference. This included a major poll, released at the conference, as well as sermons, Bible studies, an extensive bibliography on torture, and a special short documentary featuring speakers from the conference.

For more on the resources from the conferences, click here. A book, entitled Religious Faith, Torture, and Our National Soul, will be released in fall 2009, and will include all papers presented at the conference. This book will be published by Mercer University Press.
By choosing a Baptist university in the south as the location, EHR has helped to make inroads into an area that has at this point proven difficult to reach. During the conference, an additional 119 people signed the Evangelical Declaration Against Torture online and at the EHR table in the exhibit area. There are now over 650 names on the Declaration. A new group on Emory University’s campus, inspired by the conference, has hosted five events since September 2008, including a viewing and panel discussion of Ghosts of Abu Ghraib and a Q&A session with David Gushee.

7. Educational Events

NRCAT takes advantage of existing religious events to offer special educational opportunities on torture. For instance, during the weekend of March 7-10, 2008, there were large events in Washington, DC: the Interfaith Witness for Peace in Iraq and the Ecumenical Advocacy Days which brought over 1000 people of faith to DC. NRCAT sponsored two events:

- An Interfaith Mini-Conference on U.S.-Sponsored Torture was held on March 7. Ray McGovern, a former CIA official, spoke followed by a Presbyterian minister, a rabbi and a Muslim leader.
- A well-attended workshop was held during Ecumenical Advocacy Days on March 8.

In 2009, similar events will be held during the time of Ecumenical Advocacy Days. In addition, a conference co-sponsored by NRCAT’s Catholic Leadership Council will be held at Catholic University on March 19.

8. Work with the Media

In March 2008, the historian Martin Marty wrote in his blog “Most organized of the anti-torture voices was NRCAT, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, which immediately drew criticism from those who do not want to be called ‘pro-torture’, but who are better referred to as "pro-torture-policy" advocates”. The major dynamic that led Dr. Marty to write those words is NRCAT’s aggressive efforts with the media.

*The New York Times* published an editorial on Sunday, March 2nd, calling on the President to sign, not veto, the Intelligence Authorization bill with its anti-torture provision. In the web version of the editorial, the Times had a hyperlink to the words "Opponents of Mr. Bush's Policy" that took the reader to NRCAT's press release webpage. That page includes letters that were written by faith leaders and faith organizations to the President asking him to sign the bill.

NRCAT intentionally and routinely informs the media about all of its events mostly through press releases and placing leaders on radio and television programs. Some of the press releases it issued during the year included:

- January 31, 2008 - National Religious Campaign Against Torture Condemns Testimony of Attorney General
- February 13, 2008 - NRCAT Praises Senate Vote to Stop CIA "Enhanced Interrogation" Program
- February 27, 2008 - Religious Organizations Urge President Bush to Sign Anti-Torture Legislation
• February 28, 2008 - Religious Leaders Urge President Bush to Sign Anti-Torture Bill; Request Meeting with President before He Decides on Veto
• March 10, 2008 - National Religious Campaign Against Torture Condemns Bush Veto of Anti-Torture Legislation
• April 7, 2008 - National Religious Campaign Against Torture Renews Call for Special Counsel
• April 18, 2008 – NRCAT Executive Director Writes Preface
• May 20, 2008 – National Religious Campaign Against Torture Urges Congressional Action in Light of DOJ IG Report
• June 3, 2008 – More Than 275 Congregations Across the United States - Representing All 50 States and the District of Columbia - to Display Anti-Torture Banners in June
• June 4, 2008 – Human Rights Groups Call for Select Committee of Congress to Investigate U.S. Sponsored Torture
• June 5, 2008 – Nearly 300 Congregations Across the United States - Representing All 50 States and the District of Columbia - Display Anti-Torture Banners in June
• June 12, 2008 – NRCAT President Lauds Supreme Court Decision on Habeas Corpus
• June 28, 2008 – Presbyterians Join Prominent Group to Call for a Ban on Torture
• June 30, 2008 – Banners Across America 330 Congregations Display Anti-Torture Banners During June – Torture Awareness Month
• September 24, 2008 – Faith Leaders Call for Red Cross Access to All Detainees
• November 12, 2009 – Religious Community Holds “National Day of Witness;” Leaders Urge President-Elect Obama to Make Executive Order Banning Torture One of His First Official Acts
• December 16, 2008 – Vice-President Cheney Admits to Role in CIA Waterboarding Scandal: Religious Community Expresses Dismay at the State of the Nation’s Soul
• January 9, 2009 – Broad Coalition of Prominent Religious Leaders Urge President – Elect Obama to Sign Executive Order Ending Torture on the Day Obama Takes Office
• January 22, 2009 – National Religious Campaign Against Torture Lauds President Obama for Issuing Executive Order Ending Torture – Expresses Caution about the Task Force

There were 241 stories in the media in 2008 (and early 2009). A complete list of the stories is found on NRCAT’s web site at

Among these stories are:

- USA Today, “Religious leaders praise Obama decisions on torture, Gitmo” 1-27-09
- Chicago Tribune, “Obama's moves during the first days in office set tone for tackling agenda” 1-25-09
- Chicago Daily Herald, “Obama must take stand against torture” 1-23-09
- The Washington Post, “Return to the Moral High Ground” 1-23-09
- USA Today (Faith and Reason), “In Changing Times, are Religious Voices ‘Bystanders?’” 1-22-09
- The Washington Times (belief blog) “Obama’s Transition Team and Religious Groups” 1-16-09
- New York Times, “Religious Groups Seek Swift Ban from Obama on Torture” 1-14-09
- U.S. News and World Report, “Torture Tops Agenda for Religious Leaders Meeting with Obama Team” 1-14-09
- The Oregonian, “Torture Should Not Have a Prayer” 1-6-08
- Seattle-Post Intelligencer, "Articles of Faith: Local churches joining campaign against torture” 1-23-08
- Atlanta Journal-Constitution, “Two Atlanta churches join campaign against torture” 6-4-08
- Oakland Tribune, “Local clergy lobby officials to ban torture” 11-10-08

9. Promoting Anti-Torture Films

Following up on the successful Spotlight on Torture project in 2007, NRCAT continued to promote anti-torture films as an important educational resource in 2008. We continued distributing copies of Rory Kennedy’s “Ghosts of Abu Ghraib” through the online store, eventually providing 1000 copies of the DVD to congregations and religious organizations across the country. In addition, we created a list of other films for our page of educational resources, and we prepared a film discussion guide for the Academy Award-winning film “Taxi to the Dark Side” to accompany the film’s screening on HBO in the fall of 2009. A link to NRCAT’s discussion guide is included on HBO’s website.

10. Editorial Board Visits

NRCAT carried out the Editorial Board project which was funded by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. The project began in July 2008. Religious delegations were organized in seven cities to meet with editorial boards of major newspapers and urge them to editorialize against U.S.-sponsored torture. NRCAT provided background materials, training for the participants and model editorials and op-eds. NRCAT contracted with the Pennsylvania Council of Church to implement this project.

Delegations of religious leaders had meetings with editorial boards in Durham, NC; Pittsburgh, PA; Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; Milwaukee, WI and San Jose, CA.
Editorials were printed in the Durham Herald Sun, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, the Portland Oregonian, the Milwaukee Sentinel and the San Jose Mercury News. Op-eds were printed in the Concord (NH) Monitor and the San Jose Mercury News.

The learnings from this project, which were significant, will be placed on NRCAT’s website.

11. NRCAT’s Catholic Leadership Council

NRCAT organized a group of leaders from six Catholic organizations to provide leadership to the 38 Catholic organizations that are members of NRCAT. It meets monthly and had a rich program in 2008. During the year its accomplishments included:

- Produced for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) a curriculum on torture called “Torture is a Moral Issue” for Catholic parishes. The curriculum has been published and is on both the NRCAT and USCCB web sites. There have been numerous articles in the Catholic press about this new material.
- Based on the curriculum published by the USCCB, it contracted with a writer to produce study material which will be published by JustFaith. It will be a module for use in Catholic parishes.
- Co-sponsoring with two departments of Catholic University in Washington, DC a conference at Catholic University on March 19 called “Torture, Conscience and Catholic Moral Teaching”. It will explore the decisions of conscience by Catholics in the public square regarding the use of torture.

12. Public events

NRCAT co-sponsored two events on January 11, 2008 - the anniversary of the arrival of the first prisoner at Guantanamo. The Washington, DC, event was co-sponsored with Amnesty International, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Rabbis for Human Rights and Witness Against Torture. There were 6 speakers including two from NRCAT: Rev. Richard Killmer and Rabbi Gerry Serotta from Rabbis for Human Rights.

The other January event was held at Foley Square in New York City and was co-sponsored with the Metro New York Religious Campaign Against Torture (MNYRCAT). There was an inter-faith vigil which included several speakers of various faith traditions.

On March 10th, NRCAT co-sponsored a public witness in Upper Senate Park in Washington, D.C., to protest the President’s veto of legislation that would have required all federal agencies, including the CIA, to adhere to the Army Field Manual’s interrogation standards.

During June – Torture Awareness Month – a number of local congregations and interfaith coalitions organized public events as part of NRCAT’s Banners Across America project and to mark the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture on June 26. In Tupelo, MS, three Unitarian Universalist congregations from the state carried their banners in a solemn procession through the town. In Seattle, WA, the Washington State Religious Campaign Against Torture gathered people from the dozen banner congregations in the area for a press conference and public witness featuring interfaith speakers and a torture survivor. In New York City, the Metro New York Religious Campaign Against Torture held a press conference in Dag
Hammarskjold Plaza, followed by an interfaith prayer service in the UN Chapel. Many more congregations held special services and banner-hanging ceremonies during the month, prompting dozens of news stories in local papers across the country.

Several of the groups receiving small grants from NRCAT used a portion of their funds to organize public events. Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, organized a statewide conference and two regional events to encourage and equip religious leaders and congregations to educate their members and engage in anti-torture advocacy. An interfaith coalition led by the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California organized three public events in the fall, one each at a mosque, a church and a synagogue. The Los Angeles area events featured a film screening, a panel discussion and dissemination of advocacy materials. In Pennsylvania, the interfaith group Pittsburgh Against Torture organized a day-long conference featuring workshops, a panel discussion, and an interactive dramatic presentation by torture survivor and performance artist Hector Aristizabal.

As part of the National Day of Witness on November 12 described above, groups in all parts of the country organized public events in support of their advocacy efforts. In Hartford, CT, the interfaith group Reclaiming the Prophetic Voice held a vigil and press conference outside Senator Christopher Dodd’s office. In Los Angeles, the interfaith coalition organized an evening candlelight vigil in front of a church on a busy commuter route to conclude a day that featured visits to a dozen congressional offices. In San Francisco, the Bay Area Religious Campaign Against Torture organized a colorful and lively procession of 50 people as part of their meetings at the offices of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senator Diane Feinstein. In Harrisburg, PA, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches organized a press conference and interfaith prayer service following their meetings with staff of Senators Arlen Specter and Robert Casey.

13. Website

NRCAT continues to provide current information on the issue of torture and suggestions for religious organizations about how they can work to end U.S.-sponsored torture - www.tortureisamoralissue.org. The web site includes several “form emails” that can be sent to Members of Congress and other government leaders urging support for anti-torture legislation.

Since 2007, NRCAT has had a video on its web site – “Torture is a Moral issue – an Interfaith Portrait”. This 45-second video features voices from several religious perspectives affirming that no matter what torture is called, it is always a moral issue and it is always wrong.

A new video was added in 2008 – “The Faith Community and U.S.-Sponsored Torture”. This six-minute video describes the depth and the breadth of the religious community's commitment to end U.S.-sponsored torture.

The NRCAT Action Fund site, (http://www.nrcatactionfund.org), contains information and tools for urging Members of Congress to support legislation ending torture.
III. Working to have an influence on anti-torture public policy before the U.S. Congress and the President of the United States.

NRCAT uses several tools in its efforts to impact legislation before the U.S. Congress including:

1. Meetings with Congressional staff.
2. Letters to Members of Congress on particular committees and blast faxes to all members of the Congress
3. Phone calls to the staffs of specific Members.
4. Emails to NRCAT's constituents urging them to take particular actions. NRCAT’s email list consists mostly of endorsers of “Torture is a Moral Issue” which numbers over 42,000.
5. Emails to its member religious organizations to encourage them to urge their constituents to take particular actions.
6. Testimony at hearings.
7. Form emails that constituents and visitors to the web site can send to their Members of Congress and to the White House. NRCAT has had as many as 11,000 people sending an email to their federal legislators and to the President on an issue.
8. Sample op-eds and letters to the editor which constituents are urged to send to their local news outlets.
9. Fact sheets on the issues and pending legislation which are placed on NRCAT’s web site.
10. Bulletin inserts which constituents are encouraged to place in their worship bulletins.
11. Press releases on NRCAT’s messages and work.
12. Work through state ecumenical agencies to develop their strategies for special focused work on particular Members of Congress.
13. Opportunities for the Washington based staff of denominations and faith groups to visit the staff people of key Members of Congress for particular pieces of legislation.
14. Call-in days in which our supporters are encouraged to call their Members about a current piece of legislation.
15. Advocacy Days in which our supporters meet with their Members and/or their staff in-district.
16. Interfaith lobbying days in which NRCAT staff arranged and managed meetings between the lobbyists for specific faith groups and congressional staffers.
17. Prepare letters that are sent by the heads of faith groups and other senior religious leaders to key government officials on particular issues.

The legislation that NRCAT addressed in 2008, using the tools described above, included:

1. NRCAT garnered support for legislation requiring the CIA to report all detainees to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and to allow the ICRC access to all detainees. A provision to this effect was included in the Senate Intelligence Committee's version of the FY 2009 Intelligence Authorization bill. Furthermore, it was eventually provided for in the President’s executive order on interrogations in January, 2009. NRCAT will continue to work to codify this into law.
2. NRCAT encouraged Members of the House to vote for the Holt Amendment to the House version of the FY 2009 Defense Authorization bill. The Holt Amendment would have required that all DOD-led interrogations be videotaped. This practice would ensure that DOD interrogators followed the guidelines in the Army Field Manual (as they are legally required to do) while conducting interrogations. This amendment passed the House as part of the Defense Authorization bill, however it was never enacted into law. NRCAT will continue to push for legislation on this in 2009.

3. NRCAT led an effort to encourage the House and Senate leadership to establish a Select Committee to investigate the interrogation and treatment in detention of detainees since September 11th, 2001. NRCAT garnered support from several other human rights organizations for the effort. In early 2009, the focus of this effort turned to supporting the establishment of an independent, non-partisan Commission to carry out the investigation.

4. NRCAT worked to support Section 327 of H.R. 2082, the Intelligence Authorization bill for Fiscal Year 2008. Section 327 would have required all elements of the U.S. intelligence community (and their subcontractors) to abide by the restrictions in the Army Field Manual on Human Intelligence Collector Operations while conducting interrogations. H.R. 2082 passed the U.S. House of Representatives on a 222-199 vote and on February 13, 2008 passed the Senate. President Bush vetoed the Intelligence Authorization Bill on March 8. On March 11 the House unsuccessfully tried to override the veto. President Obama’s executive order on interrogations established the Army Field Manual as the temporary standard for all U.S. interrogations. NRCAT will continue to work to ensure that any techniques that are approved for use now, or in the future, are compliant with the “Golden Rule” – i.e. that we would consider them both legal and moral if used upon a captured American.

5. NRCAT was one of the first organizations to encourage Attorney General Mukasey to investigate the destruction of the CIA interrogation videotapes. It has also called for the Attorney General to appoint a Special Counsel to conduct the investigation and to expand the investigation to include the underlying conduct depicted on the tapes. According to the New York Times, several officials have said that “the tapes were destroyed in part because officers were concerned that video showing harsh interrogation methods could expose agency officials to legal risks.”

6. NRCAT supported a provision in the Iraq funding bill that would have required all government agencies to abide by the restrictions in the Army Field Manual. The bill (and the attached anti-torture provision) passed the House of Representatives, but it was defeated by a filibuster in the Senate.