



National Religious Campaign Against Torture

www.nrcat.org
campaign@nrcat.org

STATEMENT OF REV. GEORGE HUNSINGER ON BEHALF OF
THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN AGAINST TORTURE
SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
HEARING ON CIA INTERROGATION TECHNIQUES
Tuesday, September 25, 2007
2:00 P.M.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit this written statement to the committee. The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a campaign of over 125 religious organizations working together to abolish U.S. policy permitting torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of anyone, without exception. NRCAT members include representatives from the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Unitarian Universalist, Jewish, Quaker, Muslim, and Sikh communities. Additional information about NRCAT, our membership, and our work are attached to this statement.

NRCAT believes that torture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions hold dear. It degrades everyone involved --policy-makers, perpetrators and victims. It contradicts our nation's most cherished ideals. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable.

Since the disclosure of the pictures from Abu Ghraib, through the reports by released detainees and human rights groups, and up to the July 20 Executive Order by President Bush, we have been aware of the fact that the CIA has engaged in an interrogation program that uses techniques involving torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Although the Executive Order now says it prohibits such treatment of detainees, it allows the CIA to continue to use

undefined and undisclosed "alternative interrogation techniques," creating serious doubt as to whether the prohibition is real. And, as you know, the Executive Order does not close or prohibit the use of secret prisons -- the only purpose of which is perceived to be to engage in torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment -- nor does it prohibit sending detainees to countries which have been known to torture for interrogation.

With the President's Executive Order and the accompanying statements of the President and the Director of the CIA, the United States Government has reaffirmed its policy of treating some human beings as outside the protections of any law and of using -- in the name of national security -- techniques that amount to torture. We believe that the United States should be doing just the opposite -- affirming the right of every human being to be protected by the laws of civilized society and decrying any treatment that comes close to the edge of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

I am not speaking today on whether or not torture "works," the implications of our country's use of torture on our military personnel when they are captured, or the effect our use of torture has on how the United States is perceived around the world. While I believe the conclusion to each of those discussions is a compelling decision not to use torture, I am speaking to you today only from the moral or religious perspective. NRCAT is submitting this statement, because regardless of what anyone believes about torture's effectiveness (and I believe the overwhelming evidence is that torture is not effective), it is morally wrong and should never be used by the United States against anyone under any circumstances.

The urge to humiliate, torment and degrade lurks deep within the human breast. Under conducive circumstances no one can entirely withstand it. Sadism is not born but made. That is why torture, once chosen, cannot readily be contained, and is soon preferred. Torture, once chosen, both proliferates and corrupts. Proliferation is its dimension of breadth, and corruption its dimension of depth. Torture undermines victim and torturer alike. It corrodes the society that permits it. It overthrows the rule of law, and then destroys the tyrannies that it spawns. Corrupting the soul, it eventually corrupts everything in its path. Torture is itself the ticking bomb.

We speak to the issue of torture and the CIA's "alternative interrogation techniques" from our common religious principles that affirm the inherent worth and dignity of all people. Although our beliefs are rooted in many different religions, and although we worship in different ways and in different languages, we stand firmly united and unswerving on this crucial moral issue. Our condemnation of torture is not based on any political opinion or on the laws or treaties of any nations. Rather, we are guided by a higher law that serves as a compass for all of humanity.

Continuation of the CIA's "alternative" interrogation program, including the use of secret prisons and rendition for torture, is wrong. As people of faith -- who value our common humanity and our religious responsibility to treat all people with decency and the due process protections of civilized law -- we urge you immediately to stop the use of the "alternative interrogation techniques", to close all secret prisons, and to stop rendition to torture.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement.