

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES of OREGON

Media Release

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EMO praises bipartisan senate vote to shed light on U.S.-sponsored torture

Clergy urge president to lead declassification process

After more than five years of urging the U.S. government to publicly air the truth about its use of immoral interrogation tactics (including torture), “The religious community applauds the Senate Intelligence Committee for voting to seek declassification of the executive summary of its report on the CIA’s rendition, detention and interrogation program,” said Rev. Ron Stief, executive director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT), an organization representing more than 300 diverse religious organizations across the country, including Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). The report is believed to describe the CIA’s use of abhorrent acts of torture, to provide evidence that torture was unnecessary from a national security perspective, and to describe how and why the use of torture was authorized.

“The Senate Intelligence Committee took moral responsibility by voting to make public the truth about the CIA’s use of torture,” said Rev. Stief. “As people of faith, the members of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture believe that torture is always wrong. Admitting the truth about the United States’ past is the first step toward redemption.”

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon Executive Director and NRCAT Board Member David Leslie has led the Oregon faith community in urging the Senate Intelligence Committee to declassify the report. Leslie applauded the leadership of Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, who issued the following statement after the committee voted to begin the process of declassifying the 6,200 page report on CIA interrogations:

“I believe the American people will be profoundly disturbed by the contents of this report. Today, I joined my colleagues in voting to begin the process of declassifying the findings. Though I can’t provide any details until that declassification process is finished, I can say that the American people will see that much of what CIA officials have said about the effectiveness of coercive interrogations was simply untrue. I have spoken about the intelligence leadership’s culture of misinformation before and it continues to be a problem to this day.”

MEMBER DENOMINATIONS

African Methodist Episcopal Church ■ American Baptist Churches of Oregon ■ Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ■ Christian Methodist Episcopal Church ■ Church of the Brethren ■ Community of Christ
Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon ■ Episcopal Diocese of Oregon ■ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ■ Greek Orthodox Church ■ Presbyterian Church (USA)—Presbytery of the Cascades
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) ■ Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland ■ United Church of Christ ■ United Methodist Church ■ Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

"I have also been asking questions publicly for years about the role that outside contractors played in the interrogation program and I hope the American people will soon get some answers to those questions. I urge the administration to move quickly to declassify this report. It is going to make many people uncomfortable, but getting the facts about torture out to the American people will keep these mistakes from being repeated and make our national intelligence agencies stronger and more effective in the long run."

In a truly interfaith effort under NRCAT's leadership, clergy across the country published opinion pieces in newspapers in all 50 states calling for the release of the Senate Intelligence Committee report on the CIA's use of torture. In December, a compilation of all published op-eds thus far (listed online at NRCAT's website, www.nrcat.org) was distributed to the members of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to demonstrate the diverse religious community's united support for release of the report.

Speaking about the importance of the vote to release the report on torture, Jim Winkler, president of the National Council of Churches, said, "If elected leaders of the United States of America have the slightest interest in living up to the ideals of democracy and peace, they will not hesitate to make public the report on torture. The use of torture is abhorrent. Our leaders should express their deepest sorrow and regret for using torture, and they should publicly promise it will never again be employed by our nation."

Stephen Colecchi, director of the Office of International Justice and Peace at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, said, "For Catholics, torture is an 'intrinsic evil.' Only by admitting our past mistakes can the United States take a clear stance against torture and regain some of our moral credibility as a defender of human rights for all."

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, executive director of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, said, "The Jewish tradition insists that every human being is created in the image of God. American use of torture after 9/11 violated the sacred image of God. The Committee's vote to release the executive summary of its report on torture represents an important first step. However, we still need better cultural and legal safeguards to ensure that such desecration never happens again. As people of faith, we insist that the United States must be a moral guide to the world and never torture again."

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon adds its voice to those urging the president to lead the declassification process and release the full report in order to move this country to a time when torture is used no more.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations, congregations, ecumenical organizations and interfaith partners working together to improve the lives of Oregonians through community ministry programs, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, environmental ministry and public policy advocacy.