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Religious leaders take stand against torture by CIA

*Archbishop, bishops and clergy among those who call on
Oregon's senators to act on "clear moral issue"*

A diverse and prominent group of Oregon's religious leaders today announced their support for legislation to ban the use of torture by the CIA and all agencies of the U.S. government. The interfaith effort includes prominent religious leaders from the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths, and broad representation from all regions of Oregon.

Statewide faith leaders decided to act at this time because the U.S. Senate is considering an amendment to the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 that would apply the U.S. Army Field Manual standards for interrogation to all elements of the U.S. intelligence community, including the CIA and all their subcontractors. This would effectively close a loophole left by previous Congressional anti-torture legislation, which applied the Army Field Manual standard only to the Defense Department. Recent revelations that the CIA has destroyed video tapes made of interrogations it conducted have highlighted the need for further Congressional action on this issue.

As a first step in this campaign, dozens of Oregon's faith leaders from the Christian, Jewish and Muslim faiths have signed a letter to U.S. Senator Gordon Smith urging him to support a uniform U.S. policy against torture under any circumstance, and by any agency of the U.S. Government, including the CIA.

"Senator Smith has previously supported applying these same restrictions on torture to the military, and we hope he will continue to exercise his strong, independent stand for human rights and against torture when the Senate considers applying these standards to the CIA," said David Leslie, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. "Torture is universally seen as immoral in all the major faith traditions, and the United States needs to set a high moral standard for the world on this issue," Leslie continued. The *Oregon Interfaith Letter Opposing Torture* sent to Senator Smith includes the following statements:

Torture is universally condemned by people of faith and conscience as contrary to our most deeply held values. ... There are of course other, more pragmatic arguments against the use of torture. The most important of these, is that the United States must set a standard of

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

international behavior regarding the use of torture. How can we complain when other nations use torture against our soldiers if we continue to practice torture ourselves?

Ultimately, we believe that this is a moral issue that cannot be compromised regardless of the weight of the pragmatic arguments. We support the Statement of Conscience issued by the *National Religious Campaign Against Torture*:

Torture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, 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. Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now – without exceptions.

Some prominent signers of the letter include:

- Catholic Archbishop John G. Vlazny of the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon
- Robert T. Hoshibata, Resident Bishop of the Oregon-Idaho Conference, United Methodist Church
- Aleida Jernigan, Co-Executive Presbyter with the Presbyterian Church Presbytery of the Cascades
- John Gantt, Interim Conference Minister, Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ.
- Rabbi Michael Z. Cahana of Congregation Beth Israel in Portland
- Rabbi Daniel Isaak of Congregation Neveh Shalom in Portland
- Norene Goplen, Director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Oregon
- Salma Ahmad, Islamic Society of Greater Portland
- Gulzar Ahmed, Co-Convenor: Interfaith Council of Greater Portland
- Shahriar Ahmed, President, Bilal Mosque, Beaverton
- Rabbi Annette Koch of the South Metro Jewish Congregation.
- Karen Nettler, Board Chair of Oregon Center for Christian Values
- Courtney Dillard, Board Member and Policy Director for the Oregon Center for Christian Values.
- Emily Georges Gottfried, Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee Oregon Chapter
- Gregory W. Hamilton, President, Northwest Religious Liberty Association
- Bob Horenstein, Community Relations Director, Jewish Federation of Greater Portland
- Mary Jo Tully, Chancellor, Archdiocese of Portland

The complete letter and a full list of signers is available online at www.emoregon.org.

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon is a statewide association of Christian denominations—including Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox bodies—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.