

Closing Guantanamo: Time to put torture behind us -- forever

By [Guest Columnist](#)

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By David Leslie and Joseph Wolf

Today marks eight years since the U.S. government transported the first prisoners from Afghanistan to the detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Guantanamo is known around the world not only for its seemingly endless detentions without trial but also as a place where the United States lost its way and engaged in torture.

Although President Barack Obama had said the facility would close its doors by Jan. 22 of this year, he has since announced that the detention center will not be closed by that deadline for complex legal and ethical reasons.

As two Oregon faith leaders, one a Christian involved with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, and the other a Jew involved with Rabbis for Human Rights, we support the end of the use of torture by the U.S. and other nations forever, and we call for the closing of the detention center at Guantanamo Bay.

Torture is immoral because it violates the basic dignity of the human person that every religion holds dear and that our basic democratic values of liberty and equality protect. The torture that occurred at Guantanamo stains the image of our country and diminishes our influence around the world. Closing the detention center is essential to restoring the U.S. as a respected member of the global community.

But other steps are needed. The U.S. government should put in place safeguards to make sure that torture never happens again. Americans need to better understand U.S. torture policies and practices since 9/11 -- who was tortured and why, who ordered it and who conducted it, and what were its effects.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture -- comprising representatives from more than 260 religious organizations, including Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and Rabbis for Human Rights -- has called for the creation of an independent, nonpartisan commission of inquiry to investigate and make findings and recommendations to Congress and the president about what further safeguards are needed.

The president's executive order on torture mandated that all government agencies follow guidelines laid out in the Army Field Manual while conducting interrogations. But executive orders are not law; a future president could revoke it. In order to permanently end torture, Congress should pass legislation that makes elements of the executive order permanent.

The necessary protections include a "Golden Rule" standard that would require the president (or another high-level administration official) to affirm that each interrogation technique authorized for use by American interrogators is based on the idea that we will not do unto others what we would not want done unto our own soldiers.

In addition, Congress should require by law that the International Committee of the Red Cross be granted access to all U.S.-held detainees.

Eight years of a horrendous symbol of torture is eight years too many. We must all call on Congress to ensure that the detention center at Guantanamo closes in 2010 and that future generations of Americans grow up in a country that does not torture.

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