

Open Letter to the President of the United States

The Bonner County Human Rights Task Force—an organization with more than 300 members located in Sandpoint, Idaho—has gathered news reports and other documents that maintain that detainees held in custody in Afghanistan, Iraq, Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere have allegedly been tortured and even killed. A number of diverse organizations, working together, filed a Freedom of Information Act request that led to the release of detainee autopsy and death reports from the Department of Defense. In particular, the ACLU—a member of the aforementioned group—analyzed these documents and concluded that some U.S. interrogations resulted in deaths. Furthermore, in a Pulitzer Prize-winning news report from *The Washington Post*, the CIA has a policy of “rendition,” in which a person is abducted from one country and taken to another country for detention, interrogation, and alleged abusive treatment at secret “black sites.”

These practices, if verified, would be violations of U.S. and universal human rights laws. In 1988, the U.S. signed the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*; the Senate ratified it in 1994, and implementing legislation was subsequently passed by Congress. The Convention prohibits such treatment even during war. This country also voted in favor of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, a resolution which was adopted on December 10, 1948 by the UN General Assembly. Article 5 states: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Similar wording was introduced as an amendment in the Detainee Treatment Act of December 30, 2005. In addition, the *Uniform Code of Military Justice* considers cruelty or maltreatment of prisoners by U.S. military a crime.

Recently, the UN Committee Against Torture wrote a report that includes calls upon the United States to rescind any interrogation techniques that constitute torture—as defined in the report—or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; to ensure that no one is detained in any secret facility, which is a violation of the Convention; to close the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay because of the practice of detaining indefinitely without charge, nor permitting them any judicial process; and, to put an end to the transfer of detainees to countries with known torture records.

The Bonner County Human Rights Task Force deplors the alleged use of torture by the U.S. military, the CIA and other intelligence agencies, contracted interrogators and other entities in foreign countries. Even though there may be a “war on terror,” it doesn’t mean we should lower our ethical standard and allow behavior that we condemn in others. As a nation, we must demand that our government adhere to the rule of law. Therefore, we request that you, in your capacity as President of The United States, issue executive orders prohibiting these practices to all governmental agencies that may have been involved, or could potentially have been involved. We also urge you to seriously consider implementing the recommendations proposed in the report by the UN Committee Against Torture. With these actions, Mr. President, you can help restore our nation’s reputation as a beacon of enlightenment, freedom, decency and integrity in the eyes of the world and in the eyes of the American people.



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Bonner County Human Rights Task Force

Philip A. Deutchman
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