

What's Wrong with Torture?

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It has been a decade since the Bush Administration started using torture of U.S.-held detainees after the 9/11 attacks. Since then, lawyers have stated that torture is illegal; interrogators have stated that it doesn't work; and most of us know from our faith traditions that it is wrong.

Yet, former officials in the Bush Administration, including former Vice President Dick Cheney, who were responsible for the use of torture as an interrogation technique, continue to insist (despite the evidence to the contrary) that torture works. In his new book, *Hard Measures: How Aggressive CIA Actions After 9/11 Saved American Lives*, former chief of the CIA's Counter-Terrorism Center, Jose Rodriguez, is using the anniversary of Osama bin Laden's death to claim that torture led the U.S. to him – a claim that is disputed by both former interrogators and Senator John McCain, himself a victim of torture.

McCain, echoing the sentiments of former CIA and FBI experts, maintains that torture did not lead us to bin Laden. In a speech on the Senate floor, McCain said, "It was not torture, or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees that got us the major leads that ultimately enabled our intelligence community to find Osama bin Laden."

Rodriguez and Cheney claim that torture works. McCain and many former CIA interrogators claim the opposite. Fortunately, we can look forward to learning the truth of the matter. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence is completing a three-year investigation into CIA interrogation practices. This investigation is said to be comprehensive and to provide a complete accounting of the facts surrounding CIA interrogations. Making the report on this investigation public could settle the effectiveness debate once and for all.

Torture is a moral abomination that runs contrary to the teachings of all religions. It is degrading to all involved – the victim, perpetrator and policymakers. It dishonors God and the traditions of our faiths. It is an egregious violation of the dignity and worth of each and every person. To put an end to government-sponsored or authorized torture forever, the National Religious Campaign against Torture, of which the Wisconsin Council of Churches is a member, was created in January 2006. This group is leading the fight nationwide in calling for the government to be held accountable – and to hold itself accountable – for the torture techniques it used.

The world's religions teach the "golden rule" standard: Treat others as you'd like to be treated. Torture inherently violates this teaching.

Faith communities across this country recognize a moral imperative to end torture on the grounds that as a nation that aspires to set a moral example for the rest of the world, we should never subject any human being – even terrorists – to treatment which degrades and violates them and which violates us.

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