



TAKE ACTION!!

January 15, 2009

Support an End to Torture

TAKE ACTION NOW! The inauguration is around the corner. Send emails to the Transition Team <http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople> encouraging President-elect Obama to issue an executive order ending torture soon after taking office.

WHY IS THIS ACTION IMPORTANT NOW? On January 14, John Carr, USCCB's Executive Director for Justice, Peace and Human Development, participated in a press conference urging the incoming administration to set a new tone and act to end torture. That same afternoon, USCCB joined with other faith groups in a meeting with members of President-elect Obama's Transition Team. They presented a letter signed by 34 religious leaders, including Bishop Howard J. Hubbard, Chairman of USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, and discussed the need for quick action by the president-elect to issue an executive order ending torture as a way to restore America's moral credibility in the world.

The Transition Team was very receptive and cited President-elect Obama's statement last week that "under my administration, the United States does not torture, we will abide by the Geneva Conventions." Action now would affirm this position, reinforce the message sent at the January 14 press conference and meeting, and encourage Mr. Obama to act quickly.

WHAT DOES THIS ISSUE HAVE TO DO WITH MY FAITH?

The Church teaches that torture is morally wrong and can never be justified. Pope Benedict XVI said that "the prohibition against torture 'cannot be contravened under any circumstance.'" The U.S. bishops in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* labeled torture as "intrinsically evil." The attached remarks by John Carr lay out the arguments against torture in further detail.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Write emails calling for President-elect Obama to issue an executive order banning torture as soon as possible. Go the <http://change.gov/page/s/ofthepeople>, fill out your contact information, and write "torture" in the "another issue" box. When the "Your ideas" box comes up, write something like "As a Catholic, I call on the President to act quickly to end torture by issuing an executive order based on the Declaration of Principles endorsed by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture." You may also contact your members of Congress through the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 or www.congress.org to have them endorse this Declaration of Principles www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=211&Itemid=160

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: *Virginia Farris, Foreign Policy Advisor, International Justice and Peace, USCCB, vfarris@usccb.org, (202) 541-3182.*

Remarks by John Carr
Executive Director, Justice, Peace and Human Development
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
at a press conference organized by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture
January 14, 2009

I'm honored to be part of this very distinguished panel. I have an exalted title as Executive Director of Justice, Peace and Human Development, but we cannot have justice, peace and human development when our nation advocates and practices torture. There has been a lot of discussion in Congress, CIA, White House, newspapers and even television expressing confusion, dismay, disagreements, and doubts over whether torture can be used or justified.

The Catholic Church has no such doubts when it comes to torture. Torture is abhorrent and can neither be condoned nor tolerated. Pope Benedict XVI has said that "the prohibition against torture 'cannot be contravened under any circumstance.'" Simply put, torture is a classic moral case of ends and means. Good ends cannot legitimize immoral means. In the context of torture, we cannot defend our life and dignity by threatening the lives and attacking the dignity of others.

The moral test in economic life is how we treat "the least of these," according to the parable of the Last Judgment in St. Matthew's Gospel. It may not be biblical but it is also true that the moral test in this area is how we treat the "worst of these" – those who would violate all boundaries in their attacks on us.

Torture is morally wrong because it debases human dignity, which is God-given, not earned by good behavior. Respect for human dignity is a fundamental teaching of the Catholic Church. In their November 2007 statement *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. bishops declared that because torture assaults the dignity of human life, it is "intrinsically evil" (No. 23), one of very few actions to be labeled "intrinsically evil."

The Catholic bishops went on to state in *Faithful Citizenship*, "The use of torture must be rejected as fundamentally incompatible with the dignity of the human person and ultimately counterproductive in the effort to combat terrorism" (No. 81).

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has consistently and strongly opposed torture in a long series of letters to Congress and the Administration, in public statements, and in a Catholic study guide entitled "Torture in a Moral Issue," produced in collaboration with the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. We fully support this common call for an early and effective Presidential Executive Order banning torture as it would help restore the legal and moral credibility of the United States in the international arena.

In less than a week, President Obama takes office. We have areas of agreement and differences. But we hope that he will take this important step to promote a culture that respects life. In the end, this is not about them, the detainees – they have made their choices. This is about us – who we are, what we believe about human life and dignity, and how we act as a nation.