

Christians, other torture opponents call for commission to investigate

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WASHINGTON (ABP) — A coalition of religious leaders who oppose the United States' use of torture in the fight against terrorism called March 3 for a "truth commission" to investigate government policy and allegations of inhumane actions against terrorism detainees under the previous administration.

The [National Religious Campaign Against Torture](#) released the statement, signed by 23 prominent religious leaders from a wide variety of faith traditions, on the eve of Senate Judiciary Committee hearings scheduled to delve into the subject.

"We call for an impartial, nonpartisan, and independent Commission of Inquiry," the statement said. "Its purpose should be to gather all the facts and make recommendations. It should ascertain the extent to which our interrogation practices have constituted torture and 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.' Understanding the causes, nature and scope of U.S.-sponsored torture is essential for preventing it in the future and eliminating it from our system without loopholes. U.S. law will determine the extent of any criminal culpability."

It continued: "As people of faith, we know that brokenness can be healed — both in individual lives and in the life of the nation. All religions believe that redemption is possible. Learning the truth can set us on a path toward national healing and renewal."

Baptist signers of the statement were Stan Haste, minister for mission and

ecumenism at the Alliance of Baptists; and David Gushee, president of Evangelicals for Human Rights and professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University in Atlanta. Gushee also writes a weekly column for Associated Baptist Press.

The call came a day after Justice Department officials released [nine previously classified memoranda](#), produced by lawyers for President Bush, outlining sweeping presidential powers to circumvent legal constraints established by Congress on interrogation techniques and other aspects of detainee treatment.

Bush's White House claimed the authority described in the memos in response to the post-9/11 terrorism threat. Some torture opponents and civil libertarians have said the powers claimed by the memos went even further than they thought Bush's administration had.

Several similar memos are believed also to exist, but remain classified.

The [Judiciary Committee hearings](#), scheduled to begin March 4, will explore creation of a formal commission to investigate government policy on interrogation techniques under the Bush administration. The panel's chairman, Vermont Democrat Patrick Leahy, has called for such a body. So has his House counterpart, Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.).

While President Obama followed through on a campaign promise to revoke controversial Bush policies on interrogation and treatment of terrorism detainees, the White House has rebuffed calls by many torture opponents to investigate Bush officials.

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