

# Religious leaders call for inquiry into U.S. use of torture

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WASHINGTON (ABP) — A group of high-profile religious leaders from various faiths is pushing President Obama to establish a commission of inquiry to investigate alleged United States-sanctioned use of torture since 9/11.

Thirty-three religious leaders met with administration officials after gathering in front of the White House June 11. They presented a letter [signed](#) by 50 individuals representing Christian, Jewish, Islamic and Sikh organizations urging the president to establish an independent, non-partisan commission to "uncover the whole truth" about U.S. torture policies and practices.

Lavona Grow holds a protest sign during One of Obama's first acts in office the National Religious Campaign Against Torture rally outside the White House. (RNS PHOTO/David Jolkovski)

was an executive order banning torture in interrogation of suspected terrorists. The president has said he believes use of torture is wrong, but he [opposes](#) a special inquiry, believing it would be perceived as retribution against his predecessor that would become a distraction from his policy agenda.

The religious leaders contended that existing institutions are inadequate to guarantee the abolishment of torture, and that an independent commission would be more credible and thorough in establishing safeguards to prevent

future twisting or ignoring laws against torture.

"The reality is that our nation is now shackled to a shameful history of torture," the letter said. "As people of faith we know that only the truth can set us free."

"We must therefore, as a nation, be mature and honest enough to examine fully and disclose completely the wrong doing that has been committed," the leaders wrote. "The transparency and openness of a Commission of Inquiry will help to hold us all accountable for the policies and acts of torture carried out in our name. Accountability is essential in a nation of laws."

One of the signers of the letter, David Gushee, president of Evangelicals for Human Rights, wrote an Associated Baptist Press [column](#) in March arguing for a "Truth Commission" on the issue of torture. He said it is needed "because we need to know exactly what happened."

"It has been very difficult to have an honest public debate about exactly what our nation has done to those in our custody because we have never been given full information," Gushee, a professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University, said. "We have half-debated what has been only half-revealed. We need to bring what has been done in the shadows into the full light of day, and see how it looks when exposed to that cleansing sunlight."

From a Christian moral perspective, Gushee said, an investigation could move the nation closer to reconciliation.

"Biblically, reconciliation generally involves truth-telling, repentance and forgiveness," he wrote. "Unpacked a bit further, reconciliation includes the wrongdoer's acknowledgment of responsibility, confession of the act as sin, expression of grief for any harm done, serious commitment to a new course of action and request for forgiveness. It sometimes also involves some concrete form of recompense offered to the one harmed by the one who did

the harm."

"Once our nation's acts have been exposed to the clear light of day and we see that the facts merit repentance, I dream that we would demonstrate the moral courage to acknowledge responsibility for wrong acts, confess them as sin, express real grief for the harms done, commit ourselves to a new course of action (and solidify that commitment in concrete legislation and executive policies), offer recompense to those whom we have harmed where that is appropriate and ask our victims for forgiveness," he wrote.

In their June 11 letter, faith leaders quoted from Isaiah 11:2, pledging to pray for the president to receive "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of God."

*-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.*