

# Opinion: America's moral center says 'no' to torture

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(ABP) - An unprecedented bipartisan coalition of religious, political, and military leaders recently released a document expressing our shared rejection of torture and prisoner mistreatment by — or in the name of — the United States.

The signatories include former secretaries of state George Shultz, Madeleine Albright and Warren Christopher, former defense secretaries Harold Brown, William Perry, and William Cohen, four former members of the Defense Department's Joint Chiefs of Staff, and dozens of other flag officers of the U.S. armed forces, along with former senators Sam Nunn, John Glenn, and others. Religious leaders include top Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, mainline Protestant and evangelical leaders.

I have also signed the document.

Our "Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty" affirms six key principles that we believe must govern U.S. policy on prisoner treatment, and asks President Bush to issue an executive order based on them. The principles are the Golden Rule, a single national standard, the rule of law, the duty to protect, checks and balances, and clarity and accountability.

— The *Golden Rule* principle affirms that our nation will not use any methods of interrogation that we would not find acceptable if used against Americans.

— The *one national standard* principle means that all U.S. personnel and

agencies will apply the same standards for interrogation, with no exceptions for the CIA or any other agency. Currently, the best expression of a reasonably humane standard is found in the U.S. Army Field Manual, which explicitly bans a number of cruel interrogation techniques, such as waterboarding.

— Adherence to the *rule of law* requires that the United States will acknowledge all prisoners to our courts and the Red Cross, rejects any use of secret prisons or the mysterious disappearance of prisoners, and requires fully adequate judicial processes for detainees to prove their innocence.

— The *duty to protect* means a reaffirmation not just of our own rejection of torture, but of our responsibility to protect people in our custody from being tortured by other countries after transfer from our government.

— The *principle of checks and balances* reaffirms the legitimate role of the legislative and judicial branches of the federal government in understanding, reviewing, and — in some cases — setting detention policies.

— Finally, the *emphasis on clarity and accountability* means that all U.S. personnel involved in relating to prisoners must operate with total clarity as to the legal rules under which they do so and with full understanding that all who violate those rules will be held accountable, regardless of rank or position.

The over 50 evangelical leaders who signed this declaration of principles along with 150 other national leaders represent many of our country's leading Christian institutions. They are academics, denominational leaders, pastors, writers, activists, evangelists and missionaries. In obedience to Christ, they give each day to the work of loving God and loving neighbor as they have been commanded in Scripture. They are theologically orthodox

and most are not particularly politically inclined, though undoubtedly they represent Republicans and Democrats and independents.

None of us who have become involved in this fight expected or wanted to have to engage the issue of prisoner treatment and torture in the war on terror.

But when we discovered to our horror that our nation had slipped into policies permitting torture and cruelty in our name, and related policies that involved the systematic mistreatment of prisoners and denial of their basic human rights, we had to respond. My own group, Evangelicals for Human Rights, began offering such a response in the summer of 2006 and we have been working to help evangelicals bear a clear Christian witness on this issue since that time. Participation in the development of this declaration of principles represents a high-water mark for our efforts, which will continue until policies that reflect the six principles of this document have become the policies of the United States.

Everyone who signed this document did so for their own reasons. But the evangelical signatories probably all share in common this basic cluster of motivations: We have all committed our lives to be faithful followers of Christ; he comes first, and we must do what he wants us to do. We have all come to believe that a follower of the Jesus who came as an expression of God's great love for humanity cannot endorse or accept the torture or cruel treatment of any human being. Torture, like terrorism itself, is a grotesque violation of everything Jesus represents and that we have committed to be about in the world.

I personally believe that the statement — and the nature and quality of the signatories from so many sectors of American society — marks a decisive moral rejection of torture from what might be called the moral center of American culture. It is, of course, deeply encouraging that people whose lives have been devoted to protecting our nation's security and advancing

our interests in military and government service also agree that torture and cruelty do not make our nation safer or stronger. Together, then, we are saying that we must recover our moral bearings as a nation and reject policies that have both degraded us morally and harmed our national interest.

Fear, anger, and grief after 9/11 sent us off-course. But now our nation is recovering its moral compass once again.

To learn more about how the United States descended into torture and how we can get past it, come to our conference on “Religious Faith, Torture, and Our National Soul” at Mercer University September 11th and 12th. Information is available at [www.evangelicalsforhumanrights.org](http://www.evangelicalsforhumanrights.org) .

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Campaign to Ban Torture website:

<http://www.campaigntobantorture.org>