

Oregon Interfaith Letter to Senator Gordon Smith Opposing the Use of Torture by any US Government Agency

January 28, 2008

Senator Gordon Smith
404 Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Opposing U.S. Government use of torture, and expressing support for Section 327 of the Conference Report on the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008.

Dear Senator Smith,

We are Oregon religious leaders representing many faiths, denominations, and regions here in the state of Oregon. We write to express our moral opposition to the use of torture as a method of interrogation by any agency of the U.S. Government, and to ask you to strongly support a provision of the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 that applies the interrogation standards of the Army Field Manual to all agencies of the U.S. Government.

Torture is universally condemned by people of faith and conscience as contrary to our most deeply held values. For Christians, opposition is based, in the words of the National Council of Churches “on our fundamental belief in the dignity of the human person created in the image of God and in the rights accorded to all persons by virtue of their humanity.”

This view is also expressed by the National Association of Evangelicals, which has endorsed *An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture*. This Declaration is grounded in a Christian view of the sanctity of life, and in a commitment to human rights which finds expression in Christian sources dating to long before the Enlightenment. This statement reads in part:

Human rights, which function to protect human dignity and the sanctity of life, cannot be cancelled and should not be overridden. Recognition of human rights creates obligations to act on behalf of others whose rights are being violated. Human rights place a shield around people who otherwise would find themselves at the mercy of those who are angry, aggrieved, or frightened... Among the most significant human rights is the right to security of person, which includes the right not to be tortured.

The Jewish Tradition also strongly condemns torture, and this has been expressed recently when 600 North American Rabbis signed the Rabbinic Letter Against Torture. This letter states that:

We understand that the most fundamental ethical principle, which results from our belief in God as Creator of the world and Parent of all humanity, is that every human being is seen as reflecting the Image of God. Torture shatters and defiles God's Image.

The purpose of torture is to remove a person's pride, humiliate that person, or make his or her life so painful that the person does or says whatever the interrogator wants. Torture 'works' by attempting to deprive a human being of will, spirit, and personal dignity. The humanity of the perpetrators, as well as the victims, is inevitably compromised by the use of torture. Jewish tradition calls for humane treatment even of one's adversaries.

Strong statements opposing any use of torture by the US government have also been issued by The Rabbinical Assembly (of Conservative Rabbis), the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, the Union for Reform Judaism and the Jewish Council on Public Affairs.

The teachings of Islam are also quite powerful, *"Oh you who believe! Stand forth for Allah witnessing with justice. And do not let hatred of a people sway you into injustice, but adhere always to justice. That is true piety."* (Qur'an, 5:8) The spirit of this Qur'anic decree calls for an end to torture and for the universal guarantee of humane treatment and due process for all prisoners. For Muslims the use of torture under any circumstances is abhorrent. Such means can never serve the ends of justice and peace.

There are of course other, more pragmatic arguments against the use of torture. The most important of these, is that the U.S. must set a standard of international behavior regarding the use of torture. How can we complain when other nations use torture against our soldiers if we continue to practice torture ourselves?

But ultimately, we believe that this is a moral issue that cannot be compromised regardless of the weight of the pragmatic arguments. We support the Statement of Conscience issued by the *National Religious Campaign Against Torture*:

Torture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, hold dear. It degrades everyone involved -- policy-makers, perpetrators and victims. It contradicts our nation's most cherished ideals. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable. Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now -- without exceptions.

We ask you, Senator Smith, to act strongly in support of policies that clarify once and for all that no agency of the United States may ever use torture, by supporting the application of the US Army Field Manual interrogation standards to all agencies of the US government, including the CIA, and to all sub-contractors of US government agencies.

We thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Archbishop John G. Vlazny, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon

Bishop Robert T. Hoshibata, Oregon-Idaho Conference of the United Methodist Church

Rev. Aleida Jernigan, Co-Executive Presbyter: Presbytery of the Cascades

Rev. John Gantt, Interim Conference Minister: Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ

David Leslie, Executive Director, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

Karen Nettler, Board Chair, Oregon Center for Christian Values, Portland

Courtney Dillard, Board Member/Policy Director, Oregon Center for Christian Values, Portland

Emily Gottfried, Director American Jewish Committee

Gulzar Ahmed, Co-Convenor, Interfaith Council of Greater Portland

Shahriar Ahmed, President, Bilal Mosque, Beaverton

Norene Goplen, Director, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Oregon, Portland

Gregory W. Hamilton, President, Northwest Religious Liberty Association

Bob Horenstein, Community Relations Director, Jewish Federation of Greater Portland

Mary Jo Tully, Chancellor, Archdiocese of Portland

Rabbi Jacqueline Brodsky, South Coast Jewish Community, Medford

Rev. Dan Bryant, First Christian Church, Eugene

Rev. Arturo M. Fernandez, Retired United Methodist Clergy, Salem

Rev. Dan Gardner, Vale

Rev. Kent Harrop, Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church, McMinnville

Rabbi Yitzhak Husbands-Hankin, Temple Beth Israel, Eugene

Rabbi Annette Koch, Beit Haverim/SMJC, West Linn

Rabbi David Kominsky, Interim Rabbi, Temple Beth Sholom, Salem

Rev. Ryan J. Lambert, First Congregational United Christ of Christ, Corvallis

Rev. Gail McDougale, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Salem

Rev. David R. Paulson, Asbury United Methodist Church, Hood River

Pastor David Nagler, Nativity Lutheran Church, Bend

Rev. John Reutter-Harrah, Prince of Life Lutheran Church, Oregon City

The Reverend Stephen Schafroth, Episcopal Church USA, The Dalles

Rev. Stuart R. Shaw, United Methodist Church, Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference, Salem

Rev. Wes Taylor, United Methodist Church, Tualatin

Rev. Karl Vercouteren, United Church of Christ, The Dalles

Rev. Andrew W. Wendle, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Hood River

Rev. Dana Worsnop, Atkinson Memorial Church, Unitarian Universalist, Oregon City

Rev. Dave Bean, Pastor, Cherry Park UMC, Portland

Rev. Alcena Boozer, St. Philip the Deacon Episcopal Church, Portland

Rabbi Michael Z. Cahana, Senior Rabbi, Congregation Beth Israel, Portland

Rev. Dr. Chuck Cooper, Micah's Village, United Methodist

Rev. Chuck Currie, Parkrose Community Church, United Church of Christ, Portland

Rev. Bill Gates, Parkrose United Methodist Church, Portland

Rev. Lowell Greathouse, First United Methodist Church, Portland

Rev. Janis Hanson, St. Bartholomew Episcopal Church, Portland

Rev. Scott Harkness, Office of the Bishop of the Oregon-Idaho Conference of the United Methodist Church

Roy L. Helms, D.Min, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Jean Ellen Herzegh, Presbyterian Church, Portland

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Rev. Dr. John H. Hubbard, Portland

Rabbi Daniel Isaak, Congregation Neveh Shalom, Portland

Rev. Patricia Rae Kessel, Interim Pastor, St.Paul's UMC, Milwaukie

Rev. David Knapp, St. Luke Lutheran Church, Portland

Rev. Dr. Jeanne G. Knepper, University Park United Methodist Church, Portland

Rev. W.J. Mark Knutson, Augustana Lutheran Church, Portland

Rev. Robert W. Krueger, St. Francis of Assisi Priest Moderator, Portland

Rev. Chris Laing, Episcopal Church of Oregon, Portland

Rev. Shannon P. Leach, Christ Church Episcopal Parish, Lake Oswego

Rev. Susan Leo, Bridgeport United Church of Christ, Portland

Rev. Robert E. Leverenz, The United Methodist Church, Oregon/Idaho Conference

Fr. Charles J. Lienert, St. Andrew Catholic Church, Portland

Rev. Lynne Lopez, Ainsworth United Church of Christ, Portland

Rev. Kurt Levensaler, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Portland

The Rev. Dr. Caroline Litzenberger, Associate Priest for Ministry Development, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church Portland

The Very Rev. William Lupfer, Dean, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Portland

Rev. Marla McGarry-Lawrence, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, Portland

The Rev. Kurt Neilson, Rector, Saints Peter and Paul Episcopal Church, Portland

Rev. Canon Catherine P. Nichols, Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, Portland

Rev. Thomas C. Nolen, D. Min., First Presbyterian Church, Portland

The Rev. Canon David W. Perry, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, Portland

Rev. Cecil Prescod, Ainsworth United Church of Christ, Portland

Rev. John Scannell, St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, Portland

Rev. Stephen Schneider, Grace Memorial Episcopal Church, Portland

Rev. C. Paul Schroeder, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Portland

Rev. John T. Schwiebert, Metanoia Peace Community UMC

Rev. Marilyn Sewell, First Unitarian Church, Portland

Rev. Brad Shumate, Portland Community of Christ

Rev. Richard Skidmore, Kairos-Milwaukie United Church of Christ, Portland

Rabbi Ariel Stone, Congregation Shir Tikva, Portland

Rev. Laurie Vischer, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Portland

The Rev. Dr. David L. Wheeler, First Baptist Church of Portland

Rev. David D. Zaworski, Pastor, Waverly Heights UCC, Southeast Portland

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