

Interfaith Letter Calling on U.S. Representatives to Congress from Oregon to Support Formation of a House Select Committee to Investigate U.S. Use of Torture Since 9/11/2001

To sign on to this letter, please send your Name, title, any congregational or organizational affiliation, and the name of your Congressional Representative to kfinney@emoregon.org or call Kevin Finney or Sarah Goff at 503-221-1054 x204.

Aug. 4, 2009

Representative _____
2267 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for the Creation of a Select Committee of the House to Investigate U.S. Use of Torture

Dear Representative _____,

As people of faith and concerned constituents, we write to express our unequivocal moral opposition to U.S. use of torture in any form and to urge you to take steps to ensure we never engage in torture again. In particular, we call on you to support the formation of a Select Committee of the House that would conduct a comprehensive investigation of post-9/11 interrogation practices and policies.

In addition to investigating how the use of torture was sanctioned or encouraged by policymakers and government lawyers, the Select Committee should document the establishment and use of so-called CIA black sites, rendition to nations where detainees might be subject to torture, and documentation of detention and interrogation practices at Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. The investigation should not be limited to these topics but should instead have authority to investigate all aspects of our nation's detention and interrogation practices since 9-11-2001.

We also believe this House Select Committee should investigate and issue conclusions on how U.S. military personnel, intelligence agencies, and subcontractors came to engage in torture, despite having signed and ratified the *United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment*.

Perhaps most importantly, the Select Committee should issue recommendations for reforms to ensure that the U.S. never again uses torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment against any persons held in U.S. custody.

Torture is universally condemned by people of faith and conscience as contrary to our most deeply held values. At the heart of our traditions is a reverence for life and human dignity. To

many of us, torture violates the image of the divine we find in each person. Along with the *National Religious Campaign Against Torture, Evangelicals for Human Rights, Rabbis for Human Rights*, we believe Congress must ensure that we never again engage in such practices.

As the release of secret Office of Legal Counsel memos this year has confirmed, since September 11, 2001 torture and inhumane detainee treatment was authorized at the highest levels of government. Although the President's January 22 Executive Order forbade such practices, the Order is not a permanent change and is only a stopgap measure. Without a full disclosure of each step that took us down to the path to torture and detainee mistreatment we cannot close all the loopholes that allowed it to occur in the first place.

An essential measure to achieve such full disclosure is a comprehensive investigation by an independent body into our recent interrogation practices. This body would gather all the facts and make recommendations that will allow us to reform our system to prevent torture – without exceptions.

The House of Representatives should form a Select Committee with this mission, and grant it full power to issue subpoenas and compel witness testimony. Although the Standing Committees can do an excellent job of investigating particular aspects of our use of torture, their limited resources and jurisdictional boundaries prevent the kind of comprehensive and in-depth investigation needed in this case. We need to see the whole puzzle – not just the pieces.

We thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Kevin Finney
Public Policy Director with Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Residential Address:
5921 SE Hawthorne Blvd
Portland, Oregon 97215

Sarah C. Goff
Member, First United Methodist Church, Portland*
Residential address here

OTHER NAMES, AFFILIATIONS, AND ADDRESSES BELOW

* Organizational or Congregational affiliations provided for identification purposes only and do not indicate endorsement by that organization or congregation.