



# Pennsylvania Council of Churches

December 3, 2008

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As Christian living in a democracy, we always have a privilege and an opportunity to join in the national conversation about the policies of our country.

Torture of those who have been our enemies, but especially those who have never been proven guilty of any crime, should cause any Christian great sadness. We are called by Christ to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

We share with you the following declaration—presented by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, in alliance with Evangelicals for Human Rights and the Center for Victims of Torture—calling upon the President to issue an executive order banning torture based on six core principles embodied in this Declaration of Principles. As religious leaders in Pennsylvania, we heartily endorse the call for an executive order, recommended for the next President of the United States, embodied in the six paragraphs beginning with **The “Golden Rule.”** We would expect that not only Christians, but any civilized people would endorse these principles.

However, as we read the first three paragraphs before the enumerated principles for a Presidential order, we disagree with these justifications. We hear in the first paragraph talk that torture is un-American. While we do agree that torture violates the values we claim for ourselves as Americans, we also believe that other people of good will throughout the world find it abhorrent—a point made in NRCAIT’s “Torture is a Moral Issue” statement, that torture “violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, hold dear.” In the second paragraph, the ineffectiveness of torture, we are told, discounts its use. While it may be true that torture has little effectiveness, should we not refuse to use torture even if it were effective, for the reason cited above? In the third paragraph, we read the suggestion that Americans must be better than their enemies. We suggest that perhaps we should be less concerned about our claim to be an exceptional people and more dedicated instead to turning our enemies into friends.

Again, we heartily agree with the need for an executive order banning torture. While we cannot accept the rationale developed in the first three paragraphs, we believe that the principles for an executive order presented in this declaration are worthy of our support. We urge you as Christian individuals or as congregations to endorse this important document. You may do so at:

[http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=211&Itemid=160#Declaration](http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=211&Itemid=160#Declaration).

We also urge you to make use of this declaration to educate yourselves and your congregations about the issue of torture. How would you as a Christian individual or a congregation write your own reasons for abolishing torture? What reasons do the scriptures and our prayer life with Lord give for us calling on government officials to do away with torture? The National Religious Campaign Against Torture provides study materials for congregations at

[http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19&Itemid=48](http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19&Itemid=48), and worship materials at

[http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=49](http://www.nrcat.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=49).

The Lord Jesus Christ calls on us to respond with justice and love. Please join us in this important calling.

In Christ,



Rev. Dr. Marja Coons-Torn  
President, Board of Directors

Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive  
Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty

Though we come from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life, we agree that the use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against prisoners is immoral, unwise, and un-American. In our effort to secure ourselves, we have resorted to tactics which do not work, which endanger US personnel abroad, which discourage political, military, and intelligence cooperation from our allies, and which ultimately do not enhance our security.

Our President must lead us by our core principles. We must be better than our enemies, and our treatment of prisoners captured in the battle against terrorism must reflect our character and values as Americans.

Therefore, we believe the President of the United States should issue an Executive Order that provides as follows:

**The "Golden Rule."** We will not authorize or use any methods of interrogation that we would not find acceptable if used against Americans, be they civilians or soldiers.

**One national standard.** We will have one national standard for all US personnel and agencies for the interrogation and treatment of prisoners. Currently, the best expression of that standard is the US Army Field Manual, which will be used until any other interrogation technique has been approved based on the Golden Rule principle.

**The rule of law.** We will acknowledge all prisoners to our courts or the International Red Cross. We will in no circumstance hold persons in secret prisons or engage in disappearances. In all cases, prisoners will have the opportunity to prove their innocence in ways that fully conform to American principles of fairness.

**Duty to protect.** We acknowledge our historical commitment to end the use of torture and cruelty in the world. The US will not transfer any person to countries that use torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

**Checks and balances.** Congress and the courts play an invaluable role in protecting the values and institutions of our nation and must have and will have access to the information they need to be fully informed about our detention and interrogation policies.

**Clarity and accountability.** All US personnel-whether soldiers or intelligence staff-deserve the certainty that they are implementing policy that complies fully with the law. Henceforth all US officials who authorize, implement, or fail in their duty to prevent the use of torture and ill treatment of prisoners will be held accountable, regardless of rank or position.