

# Say “No” to Torture

**People are being tortured:** Torture is not new. It has been used throughout history by people in power – by the U.S., by our political allies, and by our “enemies,” however defined. What matters to us is that it is happening here and now, on our watch, with our tax dollars. We are called to respond, as Christians, as citizens, as humans.

Military and congressional investigative committees, the Red Cross, human rights groups and others have carefully documented the treatment and fate of people imprisoned by the U.S. in the war on terror, establishing the deaths of nearly 100 people between August 2002 and February 2006 alone. The military classifies some as suspected or confirmed homicides; others resulted from prolonged torture. Sometimes, rather than engage in torture ourselves, we send prisoners (an estimated 100 – 150 as of February 2006) to be interrogated in countries that use torture.

**Torture is a sin:** What is sin? Put most simply, it is the act of disobeying God, of deliberately turning our backs on God and the kind of life God calls us to live. The Bible and church teachings throughout history tell us that the life God intends for us is described as one of compassion, peace, and forgiveness. We are repeatedly told to take care of the poorest and the most vulnerable as Jesus did, laying down his very life for all. We are all made in the image of God and thus are all children of God. Jesus made no exceptions, no exclusions: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; turn the other cheek; love your neighbor; what you do for the least of these you do for me. These teachings are difficult, but not ambiguous.

To shackle one of God’s children, one of our own brothers or sisters who are at our mercy in a dark prison, and inflict great pain and suffering on him or her defies every aspect of God’s law, both in letter and in spirit. It is disobedience, it is sin. What we do to the detainees in prison, we do to Jesus himself.

**Torture does not work:** FBI, military and police interrogators say that torture does not work: the “information” gained is unreliable and even false. Time and resources are wasted pursuing the unreliable and false leads obtained through torture. A person will say anything to make the pain stop. Survivors of torture confirm that they falsely confessed to crimes, implicated others and made up false information – all to make the pain stop.

The notion of using torture to discover the location of a “ticking time bomb” may be emotionally compelling, but it is a purely fictional device, portrayed repeatedly, but inaccurately, on television and in movies. Grievously, this imaginary case of is used to justify all-too-real cases of torture.

There is a more basic issue for Christians: even if some unlikely scenario arose in which torture could be “effective,” Christian ethics are not based on “the ends justifying the means.” In other words, torture is never okay for Christians because we believe that all people are created in the image of God, even our enemies. Our actions must be motivated out of love; not fear, revenge or even the tempting illusion of efficacy.

**Torture hurts us all:** The physical and psychological effects of torture on victims and their families are well-documented and long-lasting. Survivors of torture often say that, long after the physical torture stopped, the ongoing psychological suffering is as bad, or worse.

That torture permanently scars the victim seems self-evident. Less apparent may be the damage done to the torturer, but they too suffer from knowing what they did to another human being. Most sobering of all may be the fact that step-by-step training can transform ordinary people into people who can and will torture others. These ordinary people may be our sons and daughters, our husbands and wives, ourselves.

Our country is scarred, too. Our use of torture supports the claims of those who wish to harm our soldiers and our citizens and aids their cause, endangering American citizens and soldiers, and tarnishing our nation's reputation.

The loss of soul and humanity for all involved – victims, perpetrators, their families and friends, and our country – cannot be overstated. The effects are devastating and far-reaching – our legacy for generations to come.

**Those complicit must be held accountable:** Who is torturing prisoners? Who gave the orders? Who approved the orders? At every single level of command, military and governmental, those who use and those who approve the hideous interrogation techniques forbidden under the Geneva Conventions and the UN Convention Against Torture must be held accountable. Hiding behind the claim that just “a few bad apples” are the problem, investigations have stopped at the lowest levels. But it is not a few isolated cases, and systemic torture takes coordinated logistical, technical, legal, and financial support at multiple levels.

The responsibility for torture lies not solely with the military and its private contractors, but also with the citizens of the countries that perpetrate torture. If we are silent or equivocate in any way, we contribute to the problem.

**As Christians we must stop torture:** Jesus told us what God requires of us. As disciples of Christ, we are called to care for not just the poor, but also the reviled (tax collectors, prostitutes, prisoners) and the “enemy” (Romans, Samaritans, Gentiles, those who do you harm). Obeying God's command can put us at odds with powers and principalities, but we must not turn away. People in the custody, and at the mercy, of the United States are being tortured. To do nothing is to turn our backs on Jesus and the path he has laid out for us, with his words and his life.

**Together we can:** See <http://no2torture.org> for more detailed information and for suggestions on what you can do. One of the most important things we can do is to continue to shine light on the reality of torture, wherever it happens. We can say “No!” to torture. We are a growing grass-roots organization that believes together, with God's help, we can end torture. All things are possible (Matt. 19:26). Join us.