

October 27, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The open admission by the President of the United States that the country engaged in torture is a first step in the US coming to terms with a grim chapter in its history. The subsequent release of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence summary report will be an opportunity for the country and the world to see, in at least some detail, the extent to which their government and its representatives authorized, ordered and inflicted torture on their fellow human beings.

We are encouraged by Senator Dianne Feinstein's recognition that "the creation of long-term, clandestine 'black sites' and the use of so-called 'enhanced-interrogation techniques' were terrible mistakes," as well as the Senate Committee's insistence that the report be truthful and not unnecessarily obscure the facts. They are important reminders that the justification of the torture of another human being is not a unanimous opinion in Washington, or among Americans as a whole.

We have reason to feel strongly about torture. Many of us among the Nobel Peace Prize laureates have seen firsthand the effects of the use of torture in our own countries. Some are torture survivors ourselves. Many have also been involved in the process of recovery, of helping to walk our countries and our regions out of the shadows of their own periods of conflict and abuse.

It is with this experience that we stand firmly with those Americans who are asking the US to bring its use of torture into the light of day, and for the United States to take the necessary steps to emerge from this dark period of its history, never to return.

The questions surrounding the use of torture are not as simple as how one should treat a suspected terrorist, or whether the highly dubious claim that torture produces "better" information than standard interrogation can justify its practice. Torture is, and always has been, justified in the minds of those who order it.

But the damage done by inflicting torture on a fellow human being cannot be so simplified. Nor is the harm done one-sided. Yes, the victims experience extreme physical and mental trauma, in some cases even losing their lives. But those inflicting the torture, as well as those ordering it, are nearly irreparably degraded by the practice. As torture continues to haunt the waking hours of its victims long after the conflict has passed, so it will continue to haunt its perpetrators.

When a nation's leaders condone and even order torture, that nation has lost its way. One need only look to the regimes where torture became a systematic practice – from Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany to the French in Algeria, South Vietnam, the Khmer Rouge and others – to see the ultimate fate of a regime so divorced from their own humanity.

The practices of torture, rendition and imprisonment without due process by the United States have even greater ramifications. The United States, born of the concept of the inherent equality of all before the law, has been since its inception a hallmark that would be emulated by countries and entire regions of the world. For more than two centuries, it has been the enlightened ideals of America's founders that changed civilization on Earth for the better, and made the US a giant among nations.

The conduct of the United States in the treatment of prisoners through two World Wars, upholding the tenets of the Geneva Convention while its own soldiers suffered greatly from violations at the hands of its enemies, again set a standard of treatment of prisoners that was emulated by other countries and regions. These are the Americans we know. And believing that most Americans still share these ideals, these are the Americans we speak to.

In recent decades, by accepting the flagrant use of torture and other violations of international law in the name of combating terrorism, American leaders have eroded the very freedoms and rights that generations of their young gave their lives to defend. They have again set an example that will be followed by others; only now, it is one that will be used to justify the use of torture by regimes around the world, including against American soldiers in foreign lands. In losing their way, they have made us all vulnerable.

From around the world, we will watch in the coming weeks as the release of the Senate findings on the United States torture program brings the country to a crossroads. It remains to be seen whether the United States will turn a blind eye to the effects of its actions on its own people and on the rest of the world, or if it will take the necessary steps to recover the standards on which the country was

founded, and to once again adhere to the international conventions it helped to bring into being.

It is our hope that the United States will take the latter path, and we jointly suggest that the steps include:

- a. Full disclosure to the American people of the extent and use of torture and rendition by American soldiers, operatives, and contractors, as well as the authorization of torture and rendition by American officials.**
- b. Full verification of the closure and dismantling of ‘black sites’ abroad for the use of torture and interrogation.**
- c. Clear planning and implementation for the closure of Guantanamo prison, putting an end to indefinite detention without due process.**
- d. Adoption of firm policy and oversight restating and upholding international law relating to conflict, including the Geneva Convention and the UN Convention against Torture, realigning the nation to the ideals and beliefs of their founders – the ideals that made the United States a standard to be emulated.**

Respectfully,

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South Africa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1984

President José Ramos-Horta, Timor-Leste, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1996

Mohammad ElBaradei, Egypt, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 2005

Leymah Gbowee, Liberia, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 2011

Muhammad Yunus, Bangladesh, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 2006

Oscar Arias Sanchez, Costa Rica, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1987

John Hume, Northern Ireland, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1998

F.W. De Klerk, South Africa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1993

Jody Williams, USA, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1997

Bishop Carlos X. Belo, Timor-Leste, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1996

Betty Williams, Northern Ireland, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1976

Adolfo Perez Esquivel, Argentina, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, 1980