



Statement Concerning the Use of Torture with Prisoners
Executive Committee
Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace
Psychology Division 48
July 2005

Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm. In their professional actions, psychologists seek to safeguard the welfare and rights of those with whom they interact professionally and other affected persons.... Psychologists respect the dignity and worth of all people.

General Principles in APA's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct
<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html>

The Executive Committee (EC) of the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology Division 48 of the APA (American Psychological Association) reaffirms its position denouncing the use of torture in the interrogation of prisoners.

The Executive Committee affirms that:

- ❑ All psychologists are bound by the ethical standards of their profession regardless of whether they are providing clinical services to patients or serving as researchers, as consultants to governmental or private agencies, or as experts providing information to the public.
- ❑ All psychologists are bound by the requirement to use their knowledge for human betterment and to do no harm.
- ❑ There are no circumstances under which the application of psychology to the degradation, coercive interrogation, or physical/mental torture either direct or indirect of others can be condoned
- ❑ Any provision of assistance, information, or sharing of records, to any group or individual in their application of coercive or inhumane methods of interrogation represents a serious breach of professional ethics.

The Executive Committee further affirms the United Nations (UN) Conventions and articles prohibiting torture and APA Resolution concerning Human Rights cited below.

United Nation's Conventions

The UN has adopted several human rights instruments that contain articles prohibiting torture. These standards include Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Article 1 of the Convention Against Torture includes in its definition of torture the following: "Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity..." The Convention goes on to state that no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether induced by a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for torture.

APA Human Rights Resolutions

1. 1986

WHEREAS, the American psychologists are bound by the Ethical Principles to respect the dignity and worth of the individual and strive for the preservation and protection of fundamental human rights and;

WHEREAS, the existence of state-sponsored torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment has been documented in many nations around the world and;

WHEREAS, psychological knowledge and techniques may be used to design and carry out torture and;

WHEREAS, torture victims may suffer from long-term, multiple psychological and physical problems,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the American Psychological Association condemns torture wherever it occurs, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the American Psychological Association supports the U.N. Declaration and Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the U.N. Principles of Medical Ethics, as well as the joint congressional Resolution opposing torture that was signed into law by President Reagan on October 4, 1984.

2. 1987

That the discipline of psychology, and the academic and professional activities as psychologists, are relevant for securing and maintaining human rights. That it therefore be resolved that APA applauds the ongoing efforts of the United Nations to defend and promote human rights and undertakes to commend the main UN human rights instruments and documents to the attention of its boards, committees, and membership at large.

Call for Action

Recent reports (*New York Times*, Nov, 23, 2004; June 23, 2005; July 6, 2005; *New Yorker*, July 11-18, 2005) citing a confidential report from the International Committee of the Red Cross as well as accounts from former interrogators at Guantanamo Bay implicate psychologists in the use of torture during the interrogation of prisoners. Advising, training, or directly implementing torture of individuals or groups in either national or international, governmental or non-governmental settings is unacceptable in view of APA's obligations as an accredited non-governmental organization at the United Nations (UN) and APA's 1986 Resolution against the use of torture.

As such, the Executive Committee of the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology Division 48 of APA calls for the leadership of the American Psychological Association to:

- Issue a clear statement against the use of inhumane, degrading, or coercive interrogations and the use of torture either physical or mental in the interrogation of prisoners.
- Acknowledge, based on the U.N. Convention Against Torture, that there are no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether induced by a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, that may be invoked as a justification for torture.
- Publicize both within and outside of APA the 1986 resolution concerning human rights and torture.
- Issue a clear statement against the direct or indirect involvement of psychologists in inhumane, degrading, or coercive interrogations including interrogations involving the use of either physical or mental torture.
- Finally, in light of the evidence implicating psychologists in the use of coercive interrogations and torture at Guantanamo Bay, the Executive Committee of Division 48 calls on the leadership of APA to pursue through whatever organizational and legal means possible an investigation of these charges.

Opinions expressed by the voting members of the Executive Committee of the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence (Division 48, APA) may not reflect the opinions of other members of the Society or the American Psychological Association (APA). This is not a general membership-vote policy or position statement for either the Society or the APA.