

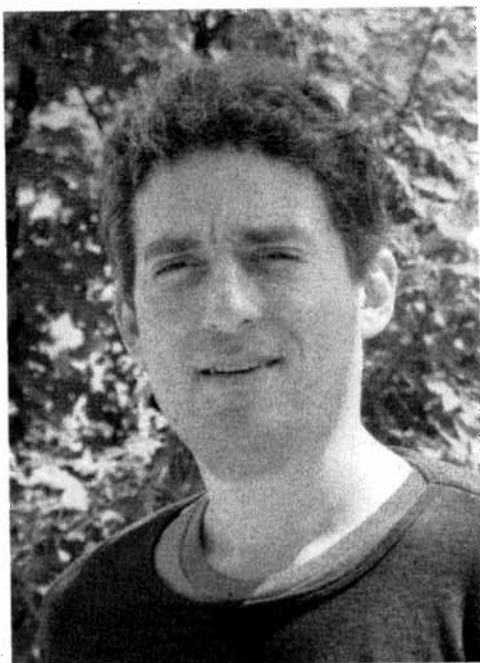
ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Peter Schwartzman

Torture must end now

Our military and government have been accused of committing torture by very reputable and influential sources. In response to these accusations, our leaders have either summarily dismissed them as false or attempted to "move on." In either case, the parties and institutions allegedly involved are not held accountable and continue to get funding and support. Their actions make us all culpable (as taxpayers and voters) especially given the attention, albeit suppressed, that these purported crimes have received. It is better that we come to terms with these issues now, before more and of the victims and their sympathizers decide that revenge represents their preferred recourse. Violence of the most barbaric kind will not bring the peace that we desire.

So who is claiming that our government is responsible for torture? In its 2004 Annual Report, Amnesty International argued that the United States was disregarding international laws in its pursuit of anti-terrorism. This 300-page report went on to talk explicitly about how the United States' involvement in Iraq was associated with "unlawful killings and torture." These are very strong words from one of the largest human rights organizations in the world, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977. Earlier this year, as reported by CBS and ABC news, a secret report put out by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) asserts that the U.S. government committed acts of torture against detainees in covert detention sites throughout the world. This revelation is significant as the ICRC "is the appointed legal guardian of the Geneva Conventions and oversees the treatment of prisoners of war" (CBS). When two of the most highly regarded humanitarian organizations in the world make such strong claims, shouldn't we take notice? But there is more. Accusations are not just coming from non-governmental agencies but from people associated with the U.S. military and government as well. As reported in the Washington Post on November 30, 2008, Matthew Alexander, leader of an interrogation team that worked in Iraq in 2006, states, "Torture and abuse cost American lives... I learned in Iraq that the No. 1 reason foreign fighters flocked there to fight were the abuses carried out at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. Our policy of torture was directly and swiftly recruiting fighters for al-Qaeda in Iraq... How anyone can say that torture keeps Americans safe is beyond me—unless you don't count American soldiers as Americans." As reported in *The New York Times* on April 21, 2009, Admiral Dennis Blair, current Director of National Intelligence, claims that, "The information gained from these techniques was valuable in some instances, but there is no way of knowing whether the same information could have been obtained through other means." He continues, "The bottom line is these techniques have hurt our image around the world, the damage they have done to our interests far outweighed whatever benefit they gave us and they are not essential to our national security." These are just two of many high ranking intelligence & military officials that have stated their serious concerns regarding the incarceration



and interrogation practices utilized by U.S. forces (and their hired contractors) in Iraq, Guantanamo, and elsewhere. It isn't like we are unaware and don't know it is happening. Abu Ghraib's photos are all over the Internet. Reports from activities going on in the Guantanamo prison are coming out regularly. "Enemy combatant" and "extraordinary rendition" are household terms. Waterboarding is mentioned so often, one might think it is an Olympic sport. Even, The School for the Americas, one of the more well-kept secrets of U.S. foreign policy, is something most Americans have now probably heard; if you haven't, visit: <www.soaw.org>. Given all this, we still don't seem to be ready to push our government to come to terms with its involvement in these horrific and unlawful acts. When will you be ready to do so?

If we are going to survive on this planet, our species had better figure out that certain destructive behaviors against one's own kind don't result in harmony and good will. Brutalizing and torturing other human beings will not make for lasting peace. We need to do all we can to root out torture in our military operations as well as in our domestic justice and police systems. Just saying "No, it isn't torture," won't cut it. We have to be vigilant. We need to bring the skeletons out of our collective closets and seek appropriate reparations and justice as necessary. If we don't, it will continue in our name. The buck must stop here. But will it?

President Obama's sentiment on torture can be summarized in the following comment he made in January, 2009: "Obviously we're going to be looking at past practices, and I don't believe that anybody is above the law, but my orientation's going to be to move forward." We can't just move forward. First we must come clean. Unfortunately, last week, the Democratically-led Senate voted 90-6 to withhold funds (\$80 million) to close the Guantanamo prison, something President Obama vowed to do during his first week in office. This past week saw President Obama agreeing to revise the "military commissions" which continue to try detainees. According to Larry Cox, Executive Director of Amnesty International, these commissions represent "a system so broken, so discredited, that it cannot be saved by any amount of administrative or legislative duct tape. Americans have put faith in their federal court systems for more than 200 years. All detainees can be tried in these courts and brought to justice. The rule of law must be our guide as the nation seeks to close Guantanamo and reclaim its moral authority." Thus, it doesn't appear that our President or Congress is fully committed to human rights or public, open trials. Thus, now is the time we spoke up and let our government (and the world) know, that the people of the U.S. do not support torture and they will not sit idly and allow such abuses to continue.