

International Day in Support of Victims and Survivors of Torture

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Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught: "In regard to cruelties committed in the name of a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible." The Jewish community feels tremendous compassion for victims of torture and outrage at their treatment by U.S. authorities around the world. As Jews, we empathize with victims of torture because of our historical situation as targets of fear and hatred. Yet in a world where our own American government is the perpetrator of the abuse of military detainees and the rendition of prisoners to secret prisons, we know that compassion and outrage are not enough. Action is essential. Today, we join with people of other faiths, and all concerned American citizens, to do all we can to end the practice of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees held by the United States. We must honor the image of God found in every single human being by ending U.S.-sponsored torture now.

Jewish tradition teaches that all human beings are created in God's image, and obliges us to protect human life and dignity. Moreover, the humanity and dignity of both perpetrators and victims is inevitably shattered by the use of torture. The Talmud teaches that to shame and humiliate someone else is akin to spilling their blood, to killing them. The treatment of prisoners in American military detention centers seems uniquely tailored to inflict shame and humiliation on detainees. Because of the divine spark within every person, because we are all created in God's likeness, the torture and humiliation of detainees can be construed as a direct affront to God. As Jews and as rabbis, we call on our government to recognize that divine spark in everyone, Americans, Iraqis, Afghans, and people of all nationalities, to end torture, and restore habeus corpus and due process to military detainees.

Torture cannot be ignored because it is happening to someone else. The Torah teaches us, "You shall not oppress the stranger, because you know the heart of the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt." As Jews, we remember the sufferings we have undergone, and it stirs our compassion for every person in this plight, whose basic humanity is denied. Torture is wrong, without exception. We cannot stand idly by while acts of torture are being committed in our name as American citizens. Jews know what it can mean to be dehumanized, blamed, and

punished collectively for the misdeeds—real and imagined—of the few. We must never allow this to happen again. U.S.-sponsored torture must end.

Today, as members of all faiths raise their voices as one and call for a restoration of law and justice, and as we stand in solidarity with victims and survivors of torture, we hope that the United States will restore the rule of law and once again regain its moral ground as a leader in the field of human rights. Together, we pray that Senator Clinton will act in the Senate to restore habeas corpus, to abolish the Military Commissions and to hold accountable all those responsible for subjecting detainees to torture, cruel treatment and other outrages against human dignity. We demand of our leaders that they honor the image of God and stop torture now.

Rabbis for Human Rights North America is a leading Jewish voice for human rights and has helped to spearhead the Jewish campaign against the torture and abuse of detainees by U.S. personnel. More than 700 rabbis have signed the Jewish Statement Against Torture.

For more information about Rabbis for Human Rights North America, please contact Rachel Kahn-Troster at 917-747-9487 or rkahtroster@rhr-na.org. Please visit our website at <http://stoptorture.rhr-na.org>.