

From: THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH
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International Day in Support of Victims of Torture Statement for June 26, 2006

I am **Rev. R. Scott Colglazier, Chief Program Minister** of The Riverside Church, New York City. I am pleased to represent the church at this press conference today, but I am not pleased that such a conference is necessary.

The United Nations has declared June 26 as the U.N. Day in Support of Torture Victims and Survivors, and as a church community we stand in support of such a day.

From the tradition of our faith we are taught that “We should not overcome evil with evil, but evil with good.” Torture, regardless of the circumstances, humiliates and degrades our shared humanity, and diminishes one of the cardinal principles of our religion, namely, that every human being is created in the image of God. Furthermore, to bring harm to someone, even under the guise of “intelligence” and “national security,” damages the fundamental essence of the divine being.

As a community of faith that takes the claims of Jesus for our world seriously, we deplore the widespread injustices created by practices of torture. The defining commandment given to us by Jesus was one of love for both our neighbor and our enemy, a love that includes nothing less than respect and dignity for everyone.

There is growing evidence that detainees at Guantanamo, and in Iraq and Afghanistan have been treated in scandalous, if not horrific ways. We are deeply disturbed and ashamed of this. We support uniform standards of conduct for U.S. military personnel when interrogating all people.

Additionally, inhumane treatment of prisoners is against standards set by the Geneva Convention, that read in part, “Neither physical nor mental torture or any other form of coercion may be inflicted on prisoners of war to secure from them information of any kind whatsoever. Prisoners of war who refuse to answer may not be threatened, insulted, or exposed to any unpleasant or disadvantageous treatment of any kind.”

The Riverside Church calls upon the U.S. Congress to create an independent, bipartisan commission to report on the detention and interrogation practices currently employed by U.S. military personnel and intelligence agencies. We believe that this commission should have free and unencumbered access to all information as they investigate the real situation in which we find ourselves, regardless of how embarrassing or distressing the results may be. We can only make improvements in our system if people have accurate and comprehensive information. We also are asking for renewed governmental oversight to insure that torture and abuse do not occur

in the future. New safeguards should be implemented immediately, and the United States should take the lead in advocating for moral and humane treatment of all people.

We have arrived at a critical moment in our global situation, and it is our hope that the United States government will do everything in its power to restore our nation's tarnished image regarding human rights, and that President Bush will lead the world in addressing this important moral issue.

While it is true we are living in a complicated time, often threatened by war and terrorism, in the end there is no threat more dangerous to the human family than our inhumane, unlawful and unjust treatment of one another. To be destroyed is one thing; to destroy ourselves out of fear and complete disregard for human rights is a travesty of the highest order. And so as a representative of the Christian faith and The Riverside Church I simply declare: "Let us say yes to God and no to torture!"