



## Resolution condemning Torture

**CMSM condemns torture in all its forms regardless of putative justification, and encourages support and help for victims of torture throughout the world, but especially in areas under the control of the United States Government.**

### Rationale:



Jesus' death and resurrection revealed the infinite value of each human being in God's eyes. [Cf. Mt 5:44-48; 10:29-31] Torture is a denial of that value. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* condemns torture as "contrary to respect for the person and for human dignity," and [Gaudium et Spes](#) of the Second Vatican Council [#27] characterizes as criminal "all violations of the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation,

physical and mental torture, undue psychological pressures," including them in a list that also contains "all offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and willful suicide."

### Resolution:

Given the universal condemnation of torture in both International Law and religious documents, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men resolves:

- To condemn unequivocally any use of torture by agents of any government for any reason;
- To encourage its constituencies to use their resources of education, preaching and advocacy to eliminate use of torture as contrary to both natural law and human dignity, and in fundamental opposition to God's salvific love for humanity;
- To join with others to work in advocacy for the abolition of torture, and to offer help and support to victims of torture.

The Justice and Peace office will be responsible for implementation.

### Additional Facts/Related Circumstances:

#### *Background:*



"The torturer has become like the pirate and slave trader before him *hostis humani generis*, an enemy of all mankind." So proclaimed the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in 1980 [Filartiga v. Pena-Irala, 630 F.2d 876 (2nd Cir.(N.Y.) Jun 30, 1980)]. In his 1958 Chicago address to the Radio and Television News Directors Association, Edward R. Murrow said, "Not every story has two sides."



The United Nations [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) [1984] defines torture as follows:

For the purposes of this Convention, the term "torture" means 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. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions. [A listing of other international documents that condemn torture is available at [www.apr.ch/un/Torture%20Definition.doc](http://www.apr.ch/un/Torture%20Definition.doc).]

Recent actions brought to light about the involvement of the U.S. military and other branches of the government in the application of torture to prisoners demand a faith-based response. The USCCB has spoken as follows on the issue:

The United States has a long history of leadership and strong support for human rights around the world. Ratifications of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture embody our nation's commitment to establishing standards of conduct and prohibiting torture and other acts of inhumane treatment of persons in U.S. custody. Tragically, our nation's record has been marred by reported instances of abusive treatment of enemy combatants held in military prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. [The complete document is available at [www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/senateletterretorture100405.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/senateletterretorture100405.pdf). ]

The CMSM Executive Committee issued a [statement](#) in May of 2004 that included the following:

The Executive Committee of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men is greatly disturbed by the revelations of torture and abuse by U.S. military personnel. We have consistently called for U.S. troops to abide by international standards and laws that govern the treatment of detainees and have questioned the lack of access that international monitoring organizations such as the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, Amnesty International have had at detention centers in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Guantanamo Bay. Reports by independent organizations and military personnel, combined with the photographs and the admission by Administration officials of the abuses indicate that the U.S. military personnel and others contracted by the U.S. to work in the detention centers must be monitored to protect the rights and dignity of detainees.

As people of faith and as leaders of the Catholic congregations of the nearly 23,000 brothers and priests in the United States we believe that we must address this issue. Each human being is created with God-given dignity and each life is precious. This dignity must always be upheld and protected but especially so



when an individual is being detained and his or her rights are already limited. They deserved to be treated with dignity and protected from violence and humiliation. As Christians we are deeply troubled that much of the humiliation and abuse violates the beliefs and practices of Islam. As U.S. citizens we are ashamed that those who represent our nation are perpetrating these abuses. We believe that as a nation we stand for the protection of human rights and uphold the dignity of all peoples regardless of their ethnic or religious background and we hold our national and military leaders responsible for the conditions that made these abuses not only possible, but who refused to acknowledge them even after they knew of the abuses.

[George Hunsinger](#) of the National Religious Campaign against Torture adapted these words from [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.](#) , delivered at Riverside Church in New York in 1967:



A time comes when silence is betrayal. [People] do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness so close around us. We are called upon to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls "enemy," for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers and sisters.

**Resources:**

A powerful article by Gary Haugen titled "Silence on Suffering: Where are the voices from the Christian community on cruel and degrading treatment of detainees?" appeared in [Christianity Today in October of 2005](#).

Other useful links:

- [The National Religious Campaign against Torture](#)
- [Torture Abolition and Survivors Network International](#)
- [Amnesty International](#)
- [Center for the Victims of Torture](#)

**Origin of Proposal:** CMSM Justice and Peace Committee

**Budget:** none

**Contact Person:** T. Michael McNulty, SJ, Justice and Peace Director

Illustrations are from the Stations of the Cross in the UCA Chapel, El Salvador, photographed by Don Doll, SJ (available at <http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/UCAstations2.html>)