

September 21, 2006

Senator John McCain
241 Senate Russell Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McCain,

As medical and psychological professionals who are deeply committed to our nation's traditional safeguards against torture and abuse of prisoners and detainees, we urge you to do all you can to clarify that the language and legislative history of the military commissions legislation does not operate to exempt the Central Intelligence Agency (or any other US government agency) from the absolute ban on torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.

We strongly support your efforts to prevent all US personnel from engaging in harmful and abusive interrogation practices and to preserve long-standing US observance of the Geneva Conventions. We also welcomed passage of the McCain Amendment last year because it seemed to give force to our own professional codes of ethics, which not only prohibit us from participating in torture and ill-treatment but require us to oppose such abuse wherever it occurs, guided by the principle that torture and abuse are prohibited absolutely, in any circumstance or context, with no exceptions.

We strongly believe, therefore, that the legislation addressing military commissions and the War Crimes Act must not allow harsh and abusive interrogation tactics by any government agency, including the CIA - methods that unquestionably violate the traditions and values you have long defended. There must be no mistake about the brutality of the "enhanced interrogation methods" reportedly used by the CIA. Prolonged sleep deprivation, induced hypothermia, stress positions, shaking, sensory deprivation and overload, and water-boarding (which may still be authorized), among other reported techniques, can have a devastating impact on the victim's physical and mental health. They cannot be characterized as anything but torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and we urge that the legislative history makes this explicit.

As health professionals, these abuses and the harm they cause deeply offend our ethics and values. As Americans, they offend the traditions and principles we have long shared and cherished as a nation. As both health professionals and American citizens, we urge you to ensure that no one is authorized to violate these defining principles in the name of the United States.

Sincerely,

Allen S. Keller, MD (Program Dir., Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture)

Gerald P. Koocher, PhD (President, American Psychological Association)

Burton J. Lee, MD (Physician to the President for George Herbert Walker Bush*)

Bradley D. Olson, PhD (Chair, Divisions for Social Justice, Amer. Psychological Association*)

Steven S. Sharfstein, MD (Immediate Past President, American Psychiatric Association*)

Brigadier General Stephen N. Xenakis, MD (USA-Ret.)

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Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) mobilizes the health professions to advance the health and dignity of all people by protecting human rights. As a founding member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, PHR shared the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.