

Open Letter to the American Psychological Association & the Psychological Community by the American Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) Psychological Network

August 14, 2015

As members of the Middle Eastern/ North African (MENA) psychological community, we are united in our deep concern regarding the events spanning the past decade that were documented in the Independent Review Relating to Ethics Guidelines, National Security Interrogations, and Torture ("the Hoffman report"; <http://www.apa.org/independent-review/>). We believe in human rights and dignity for all people, regardless of national origin, religion, or race/ethnicity. One of the most disturbing findings was that members of the American Psychological Association's (APA) leadership colluded with U.S. governmental offices such as the Department of Defense (DOD), to the point of positioning our policies to align with those external bodies, thereby eroding our integrity as an independent organization. It is disheartening to see a deficiency of contemplation and self-reflection on the part of those entrusted with navigating difficult ethical questions, and it is disgraceful that some in APA leadership ignored and dismissed the tireless voices of dissent and ethical consciousness along the way.

Through its actions (and inaction), APA maintained conditions that have made it possible for psychologists to participate in abusive interrogation practices at a time in American history when these human rights violations were publicly known. By not taking a clear stance against torture, APA indirectly aligned itself with voices legitimizing state-sponsored violence and oppression against marginalized groups in nations around the world. Turning a blind eye to torture of any human is in opposition to the ethical principle of doing no harm (nonmaleficence) and essential values of social justice and compassion. Moreover, APA has not undertaken earnest efforts to support communities (such as MENA Americans) that faced and continue to face rising psychological distress, especially post-9/11. As such, APA failed to show effective leadership, sensitivity, and wisdom in responding to the ethical quandaries and time-sensitive psychological concerns that arose within the context of America's "War on Terror."

The erosion of ethical standards and protections at APA parallel the erosion of civil liberties, human rights, and protective policies in the United States since 9/11 that has disproportionately targeted minority groups. As such, we have witnessed over a decade of heightened violence and discrimination against MENA populations that has been substantially overlooked. MENA Americans of diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, as well as Muslim Americans including those of MENA, African American, and South Asian backgrounds have faced increasing institutional oppression by law enforcement (e.g., profiling, surveillance), schools (e.g., invisibility or bias in curriculum), and employers (e.g., hiring discrimination). This oppression and marginalization is also evidenced by government policies. For example, although commendable efforts are underway to change this for 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau buries MENA within the category of "White/Caucasian," thus excluding these populations from minority benefits and protections. Similar forms of marginalization are found within APA, where MENA groups have largely been invisible. Psychologists, in particular, should provide a safe haven to cope with such events; not contribute to the oppression of these groups. While there has been discussion after the release of the Hoffman report regarding implications for APA and the profession of psychology, what has been noticeably omitted in official APA discourse is acknowledgement of those who have been harmed by the events - namely marginalized ethnic/racial and religious groups. This professional myopia further marginalizes and victimizes these same groups. The majority of victims of

torture at Guantanamo Bay and other interrogation sites were Arab and/or Muslim. Neglecting to address the impact of these events on MENA communities reflects a persistent systemic problem of invisibility of these populations, which we believe contributed to the lapses in effective or ethical decision-making as described in the Hoffman report. As members of communities that have long understood the traumatic consequences of human rights violations, our inclusion within APA decision-making bodies is of paramount importance and may have led to a different outcome.

We are concerned about loss of public trust in the profession of psychology, especially among communities of color, including those of MENA and Muslim backgrounds. The current events tarnish the reputation of psychology. Harmful consequences for these communities may include a re-experiencing of previous traumas, a sense of disempowerment, and apprehension and reluctance to engage in psychological service and research. The challenges of repairing these kinds of damages in groups that are already underrepresented in mental health services and research are extensive and complex. We must work together to restore faith and trust in the helping professions. We are encouraged by resolution NBI #23B, passed by APA Council on August 8, 2015, which bans psychologists' participation in national security interrogations. However, we recognize the necessity of further action and continued dialogue to ensure protection of marginalized groups.

This is a key moment in history in which APA has the opportunity to truly transform into a model of inclusivity and justice in the broader national and international communities. We encourage previously unheard groups to speak up during this time, and those with more privileged identities to listen to marginalized groups that have historically been silenced within the field of psychology. It is our hope that such efforts will not only unify diverse divisions of APA around the goal of "do no harm," but elevate our ethical standards to include checks and balances that ensure that our actions are "doing the most good." To this end, we as MENA professionals and students urge the following actions be taken by APA:

1. Sincerely address the five main domains outlined by Soldz and Reisner (<http://tinyurl.com/Soldz-Reisner>), which are desperately needed to restore trust in the profession of psychology. These areas are Contrition, Accountability, Transparency, Inclusiveness, and Genuine Change.
2. In line with the importance of self-reflection as highlighted in multicultural guidelines and the ethics code, conduct a thorough self-examination of long-standing aspects of the organizational culture at APA that fostered the egregious events documented by the Hoffman report. This should include the explicit and implicit values that underlie our identity as psychologists and drive the strategic plan of APA, as well as the structural and cultural factors at APA that were impediments to self-correcting a faulty course.
3. End the invisibility of MENA psychologists by formally recognizing MENA as an underrepresented ethnic group across all structures at APA, including adding MENA to all demographics surveys (e.g., membership forms, journal statistics) and acknowledging MENA as a valid population in opportunities for ethnic/racial minority-focused research grants, awards, and student supports.
4. Encourage representation within APA of MENA individuals through committees and leadership roles, and invite MENA representatives alongside representatives from other traditionally marginalized groups.

5. Intentionally include representation from multicultural communities - including those of MENA and Muslim backgrounds - on the blue ribbon ethics panel and other efforts moving forward to re-examine psychological ethics. The voices of diverse communities can help shape the ethical codes and structures in ways that are more culturally sensitive and re-focus ethics on psychologists' responsibility to society.
6. Publicly acknowledge in writing and formally apologize to communities of color, especially MENA and Muslim communities, for APA's complicity in abusive interrogations by psychologists. This echoes sentiments raised during the August 8, 2015 APA Convention's town hall meeting when several brave allies called for more attention to the groups harmed by APA's stances, and requests were made for an apology to the Muslim community.
7. Show greater initiative in reaching out to MENA American and Muslim American communities. Suggestions include assessing the direct and indirect harms caused by the collusion with DOD; soliciting feedback about steps that can help communities feel supported by APA; establishing an APA task force to determine the psychological needs of MENA populations; as well as promoting culturally competent methods in serving these communities within clinical work, research, and advocacy. These efforts would build upon the encouraging decision by APA's Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) to establish the MENA Working Group which began in 2012.
8. Reach out to populations and professional psychology organizations in the Middle East and North Africa to better understand the international implications of the APA's actions, and engage in cross-cultural dialogue about ethical responsibilities of psychologists.

In the words of Lebanese-American writer Khalil Gibran (1994, p. 25):

'They say that the desire to survive requires an attack on the rights of others. And I say, 'Safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful end of a human being.'

[for information regarding how to sign this letter, or whom to contact regarding the letter, and the American MENA Psychological Network, scroll to the end of this document]

Respectfully signed by the American MENA Psychological Network and allies (in alphabetical order),

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Menatalla Ads, MA (APA; APAGS; Div 45, 53, 54; MPA)

Rehman Y. Abdulrehman, PhD (APA)

Glenn Adams, PhD (former member of APA who renounced membership long ago due to many issues... including those relevant to the open letter, but also... the extent to which it continues to serve interests of racial and colonial power)

Sawssan Ahmed, PhD (former member of APA; did not renew due to torture issue)

Juhayna Ajami, PsyD (I am up for a renewal of my APA membership... I am currently not inclined to renew due to the torture issue)

Alaa AlDoh (Div 27)

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Anisah Bagasra, PhD (APA)
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Reema Baniabbasi, MSc (Stopped paying my dues because of torture issue....)
Kira Hudson Banks, PhD (APA; Div 45; APS)
Martha Banks, PhD (APA; Div 35, 45)
Shima Bazazzadeh, MS (APA; APAGS; Div 5, 16)
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Art Blume, PhD (Div 12, 45 fellow, 50; SIP)
Bruce Borkosky, PsyD (APA; Div 41)
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Thomas Brian, EdD (APA; ABCT)
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Candice Crowell, PhD (APAGS; Div 17)
Martha Davis, PhD (Did not renew APA membership due to torture issue)
Lisa De La Rue, PhD (APA; Div 7, 35, 53)
Serdar M. Degirmencioglu, PhD (Div 9, 27, 48)
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Kathleen Dockett, EdD (APA Fellow; Div 27, 45, 48; PsySR)
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Yese Ege, EdS
Katie Eichner, MS (APA; Div 44, 35)
Elaine (MPA)
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MENA and as a Canadian)
Nabil Hassan El-Ghoroury, PhD (APA, Div 42, 45, 54)
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 Melinda A Garcia, PhD (Div 35, 45; SIP; NLPA)
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 Mona Ghosheh, PhD
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 Anisa N. Goforth, PhD, NCSP (APA; Div 16; NASP)
 Karen J. Goodman, PhD (Did not renew APA membership several years ago due to torture issue.)
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 Ian Hansen, PhD (Div 8, 48; PsySR; was never a member of APA but am considering joining to ensure that recent changes are a beginning not an end)
 Nadia T. Hasan, PhD (APA; Div 17, 35, 44, 52; PsySR)
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 Michael R. Jackson (APA; Div 5)
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 Ae-Kyung Jung, PhD (APA; Div 17)
 Nahal Kaivan, MA (Not a member of the APA or any of its divisions because of the gross mis and non-representation of MENA people)
 Scott Kaplan, PhD (APA; IllinoisPA)
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 Robert Keisner, PhD (PsySR)
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 Maryam Kia-Keating, PhD
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 Deb Kory, PsyD (I wrote my dissertation about the APA and torture, and quit APA as a result in 2007. Arab and Muslim lives matter.)

Jill Kuhn, PhD (Div 35, 44; refuse to re-join the national organization at this time in history)
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 Kimberly Smith, PsyD (APA; Div 35, 40, 45)
 Michelle Stein, PhD (Div 41; I have not been a member of apa in years and when I was it was as a student...)
 Stephen Soldz, PhD (APA; Div 39; PsySR; Coalition for an Ethical Psychology)
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To sign your name to this open letter, and/or to be updated or participate in psychological efforts related to MENA American communities (including Arab, Iranian/Persian, and Turkish), please visit this link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1mWWxlJ5XF9E2Fzt9uNJR_S2HEPVnpadkyWql8Q_Lo3o/viewform?usp=send_form

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The American Middle Eastern/North African Psychological Network is a group of psychologists of MENA descent and others interested in psychological practice, research, and advocacy as it relates to this population. This “network” began as an informal group that has been meeting at the APA convention and related conferences for more than 10 years.