

Statement against Torture

The following statement against torture has been endorsed by the signatories below, all of whom are GSAPP alumni. The position taken does not necessarily represent the point of view of the GSAPP Alumni Organization or GSAPP as a whole.

The undersigned Alumni of Rutgers University Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology affirm the following positions adapted from the Psychologists for Social Responsibility position paper on Torture:

We recognize that U.S. prisons and detention centers for so-called "enemy combatants" misuse and abuse certain psychological principles to abet torture and other detainee abuse. These abuses often occur in secret and under the guise of national security. This use of psychological techniques of abuse--"psychological torture"--has been developed in systematic ways over the past 50 years. Recent abuses at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and Bagram, Afghanistan have brought worldwide condemnation for the psychological horrors of prolonged isolation, sensory deprivation and overload, attacks on personal identity, and culturally-inspired humiliations.

Revelations from journalists and government reports document that psychologists have been central in the design, implementation, standardization, and dissemination of the U.S. program of psychological torture. Yet decades of psychological research into such topics as social influence, stress, cultural and religious identification, false confessions, and interpersonal relationships point to the conclusion that torture is an ineffective means of gaining accurate information for national security purposes—and psychological torture is no more effective at generating reliable intelligence than is physical torture.

Because of psychologists' central role in designing U.S. abuse--and because, worldwide, many survivors of torture recall that a mental health professional was

present during their torture--psychologists have a special responsibility to use their knowledge and expertise to oppose torture in general, and psychological torture in particular. Furthermore, psychologists need to disseminate the message from psychological research that torture does not lead to accurate intelligence.

Towards this end, the undersigned strive to be global partners for peace by supporting international human rights. We denounce the precepts of "American exceptionalism" that aim to excuse our nation from upholding international standards. We believe ethnocentric attitudes sustain systems of domination and thereby further global conflict. We take seriously a professional commitment to "do no harm." We form alliances with diverse groups working to end torture, especially those who have been subjected to and silenced by torture. Research, articles, seminars, discussion groups, resolutions, and protest demonstrations are just some of the means we employ, individually and collectively.

As ethical professionals, we acknowledge that psychologists can be willingly or unwillingly complicit in the implementation of torture and abuse. We strive to address all forms of complicity. We believe psychologists should not be involved in the interrogation of detainees in settings where human rights are violated. Due to the lack of professional accountability at Guantanamo, at secret CIA "black sites," and at other U.S. detention facilities, we believe that a psychologist's role should be restricted to that of a professional healer wherever human rights are not guaranteed. While our primary focus has been on the abuses occurring in U.S. national security detention facilities, we are also committed to using psychological knowledge and expertise as partners in efforts to oppose torture and abuse in other situations, including criminal justice systems and other institutions of domination.

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