AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

June 4, 2009

Director Leon Panetta
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, DC 20505

Dear Director Panetta:

We are writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) to commend and urge you to maintain your steadfast commitment to protecting the human rights and welfare of detainees in U.S. custody. Paramount among our association's concerns is that no detainee be subjected to the "enhanced" interrogation techniques (including waterboarding) of the Bush administration or to any other form of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

Last summer, our membership voted to adopt a referendum to limit the roles of psychologists in unlawful detention settings. This new policy entitled, "Psychologists and Unlawful Detention Settings with a Focus on National Security," prohibits psychologists from working in detention settings that are in violation of the U.S. Constitution or international law (e.g., the Geneva Conventions and the U.N. Convention Against Torture), unless they are working directly for the persons being detained or for an independent third party to protect human rights, or providing treatment to military personnel.

For the past 20 years, APA policy has unequivocally condemned torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, which can arise from inappropriate interrogation procedures or conditions of confinement in unlawful detention settings. It is now a violation of APA policy for psychologists to work in such settings, with the few exceptions noted above.

Following the recent release of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee report and the Justice Department memos, the public spotlight has focused on disturbing reports of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of detainees during the Bush administration. Regrettably, we have learned that some psychologists were involved in promoting the use of harsh interrogation techniques as part of the "war on terror." Media reports first alerted us to the actions of two psychologists who, while on contract to the CIA, had advocated reverse-engineering SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape) techniques for the purpose of interrogating detainees. The SERE program was developed to prepare U.S. military personnel for exposure to harsh interrogation techniques in the event of capture by hostile forces and was never intended as an interrogation tool.

750 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242
(202) 336-5500
(202) 336-6123 TDD
Web: www.apa.org

Please Recycle

As a result of these reports, we have recommitted ourselves as an association to safeguarding the welfare and human rights of individuals detained by the U.S. government. In these difficult times, we fully recognize the significant challenges faced by your agency and the Obama administration. APA applauds and strongly supports the administration's commitment to protecting the legal rights of detainees and to ensuring that interrogations never involve torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.

In closing, we once again urge you and your agency to ensure that the highest ethical standards are being upheld and that detainees are granted all rights guaranteed to them under the U.S. Constitution, the U.N. Convention Against Torture, and the Geneva Conventions.

Sincerely,

James H. Bray, Ph.D.
President

Norman B. Anderson, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer