

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

February 13, 2017

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Sessions:

We are writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) to request in the strongest possible terms that you and the Department of Justice to refrain from reinstituting enhanced interrogation techniques or any other form of torture or abusive treatment of detainees in U.S. custody.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States, with 115,700 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students as members and affiliates. Our mission is to advance the creation, communication, and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives. Our members are bound by ethical principles that call us to "respect the dignity and worth of the individual and strive for the preservation and protection of fundamental human rights."

As you can see from the accompanying letter, there is a groundswell of concern from our membership about any future government action that would authorize torture or other abusive treatment of detainees. This letter was generated by our Division of Military Psychology and was endorsed by 40 of our 54 membership divisions.

While we laud your commitment to keep our country safe from terrorism, intelligence-gathering activities that rely on coercive techniques, such as waterboarding, are ineffective and inhumane. There is no credible scientific evidence that torture works to uncover information from detainees. To the contrary, it has been demonstrated that actionable intelligence can be obtained through rapport-building and other nonharmful approaches.

Since 1985, APA has issued numerous policies condemning torture, which have been reaffirmed and refined over the years. Our policies draw upon international human rights instruments and have expressly adopted the definitions of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment in the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. We plan to inform you further about these vital policies in subsequent correspondence.

In conclusion, the use of enhanced interrogation techniques or other forms of torture or abusive treatment would deprive detainees of basic human rights and would diminish the stature of our nation in the international community.

Sincerely,

Antonio E. Puente, Ph.D.
President

Cynthia D. Belar, Ph.D., ABPP
Interim Chief Executive Officer

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