



Partners Toolkit for January 2007

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Citizens for Global Solutions
Partners Nationwide Teleconference

–Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy–

Saturday, January 13th, 2006
1:00pm Eastern time

Dial: 800-391-2548
Verbal password: V A 3 1 7 8 5 5

Speakers

- Raj Purohit, Senior Fellow, Programs, Citizens for Global Solutions
- Tom Moran, Edward Rawson Trainee, Outreach & Advocacy, Citizens for Global Solutions
- Valerie Schrock, Director of People, Outreach and Advocacy, Citizens for Global Solutions

Agenda:

- Discussion on the creation of a Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy
- January/February Partners' Project
- Update on previous Partners' Project and Flash Movie Contest

Here are some useful tips regarding how to access the call:

- Participants should dial in 15 minutes prior to the scheduled start time.
- When dialing in, the host and participants should hold the line for an operator.
- Participants will verbally give their password to the operator.
- All hosts should identify themselves accordingly to the operator when they dial in.
- Operators will take the city, state and number of people in the room and place them into the Main Conference.



It's Time for an Independent Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy

With the Iraq war and the broader war on terror major priorities on the agenda of the new 110th Congress, many are hoping that Members of Congress will be able to move past partisanship when it comes to policy-making on counter-terror issues. From torture and interrogation policy to Iraq and the Middle East, many feel that the White House has approached these issues in a way that does not reflect the overall views of U.S. policy-makers. This approach has increased divisions between and even within parties, plunging U.S. politics to new partisan lows. As a result, effectively tackling issues like terrorism has become extremely challenging. This is deeply disturbing because in the arena of counter-terror policy, the cost of ineffective action has had serious implications.

One issue the new Congress must take up sooner rather than later is that of torture and interrogation. Despite continued efforts by private citizens, community groups, retired military leaders and a few bipartisan legislators to seriously deal with these issues, very little has been done by the U.S. government. One such effort was the creation of the Military Commissions Act of 2006 to "facilitate bringing to justice terrorists and other unlawful enemy combatants through full and fair trials by military commissions, and for other purposes." Unfortunately, this failed to address the broader problem, as this act only applies to areas within U.S. jurisdiction. Therefore, detainees in places like Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere continue to be held without charge and without access to lawyers.

Despite the creation of this bill, however, the president continues to have sweeping discretion in the arena of interrogation technique. Unfortunately it seems unlikely that Congress, by itself, will engage the White House and effectively tackle an issue that has blocked it twice during the current session.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provision stating: "no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment," is the most

fundamentally accepted of all human rights. Sadly, however, it seems that the Bush Administration has used the war on terror as an excuse to label the Geneva Conventions “quaint” and outdated. This has brought about a damaging course of action that misleadingly justifies torture as a necessary instrument of war. The extra powers granted to the president after the heinous acts of September 11, 2001 have led to an abuse of power that contradicts international law and treaty obligations, ultimately undermining U.S. national security and the country’s rightful standing as a responsible world leader.

The Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, a treaty to which the U.S. is party, defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering...is intentionally inflicted on a person...when such pain or suffering is inflicted by...a public official or other person acting in an official capacity." Furthermore, it explicitly requires each member country to "take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture."

Sadly, however, the Iraq invasion and the broader war on terror have spawned an extreme governmental sanctioning of prisoner abuse like that which surfaced at Abu Ghraib. This strategy is illegal, immoral, counter-productive, and cannot be allowed to continue. Above all, it weakens the solid foundations of freedom and justice that America has worked tirelessly to build over the years.

In an era where politics has become increasingly polarized, with the crafting of new counter-terror policy reflecting entrenched partisan divides in Congress, there is concern across the political spectrum about the use of torture as a viable interrogation strategy. As reports of torturous conduct continue to increase in frequency, reflecting a seemingly alarming level of unchecked Executive power, some Republicans as well as Democrats have openly criticized the Bush administration for its policy on interrogation. This is important, for it reinforces the fact that opposition to these policies is increasingly bipartisan and articulates the pursuit of freedom and justice as fundamental American values that have nothing to do with being Republican or Democrat.

Despite this, however, legislation that would make it far more difficult for the

administration to pursue such extreme tactics without restraint or accountability continues to be blocked. While critics of the Bush Administration's policy on torture and interrogation from both political parties serve as proof of the political will to address this problem seriously, the time has come for our elected officials to step up and defend the values and virtues that America has always stood for.

At this juncture, it seems that the wisest course of action for the next Congress is to create an Independent Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy. It's time for the U.S. to comprehensively address the scandals of Abu Ghraib and beyond.

An Independent Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy would bring together a broad range of experts able to collectively comprehend the entire issue, its consequences and necessary policy prescriptions. The experts would be drawn from the intelligence, foreign policy, law enforcement, military, veterans, legal and human rights community. Additional members could include representatives of the faith community, theologians, cultural specialists and historians.

The mandate for the Commission would be broad. Since the issue of torture and interrogation penetrated the public conscience in early 2004, when the Abu Ghraib Iraqi prison scandal became global front page news, the story has grown in complexity. We now know that the U.S. military initially started investigating crimes committed by its personnel at Abu Ghraib in 2003. In Iraq, horror stories about the use of torture by U.S. military personnel were prevalent over a year before the first Abu Ghraib pictures were publicly seen.

In addition to the appropriate and necessary focus on U.S. prisons in Iraq, the Commission would also be charged with investigating torture in Afghanistan, the CIA secret prison network, the U.S. facilities at Guantanamo Bay, the use of rendition (the transfer of detainees to foreign countries where they may suffer abuse) as a counter-terror tactic by the U.S., opportunistic use of torture by other governments and the use of torture in the U.S.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission should be armed with subpoena powers and a budget equal to the scope of its task. The Commission must release its final report publicly without redaction (edits).

It's important to note possible arguments of those opposed to the creation of a bipartisan commission. Some may say that Congress has already addressed the issue of torture. Others may say that this sort of deep analysis into the issue of torture is not necessary. To both arguments the response is the same:

The use of torture by, on behalf of, or as a consequence of U.S. policy decisions has resulted in massive human rights violations, significant damage to the image of the country and has placed U.S. service members at risk across the globe. For all of those reasons, and because we need to publicly recommit the nation to human rights and the rule of law, an Independent Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy must be created.

January/February Partner's Project:

Sign a petition in support of creating an independent Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy, to tell your elected officials that America must be above torture. Get as many people as you can to sign it. Use the new Activist Toolkit to take action for a Bipartisan Commission.

As part of our anti-torture campaign, we have created a website highlighting a petition that you can sign to tell your elected official that the U.S. must be above torture. Ask your leaders to support the creation of an independent Bipartisan Commission on Torture and U.S. Interrogation Policy by visiting <http://endtorture.net>. Once you have signed the petition, get as many of your friends and family as you can to sign it, too.

Once that's done, take a look at our brand new Activist Toolkit (to be launched toward the end of January). Although this toolkit will be a general "how to" for all the issues that are

important to you, we will include special guidelines on how to be an activist on the specific issue of torture. Whether you're a seasoned activist or a novice, there's something for you in this toolkit. Learn how to lobby your elected official, plan a town hall meeting, or host a fun and meaningful party. For those of you not really into "event planning", per se, or if you simply don't have time, we've got useful tips on how you can call or write your leaders on the issues that are important to you. We'll even give you ideas on the easiest and most effective way of being an activist: simply talking to your friends and family about the issues.

This Activist Toolkit will be ready for distribution (and will be posted on our website) in the next couple of weeks. So, stay tuned!

Monthly Report of Your Accomplishments for November/December

Chapter _____ Leader _____

What is your chapter working on? How are your events and meetings going?

Did you carry out the November/December project?

Have you worked on any other past Partner's Projects in the last two months?

If so, what did you like about the projects and what didn't you like?

Do you feel this project made a difference?

Is there anything the national office can help you with?

Have you written any LTEs? Were they printed?

*****Please remember that you don't have to do ALL of the projects, but please do let me know about which ones you have chosen to work on.*****

Letters to the editor and op-eds (Please note them here even if you are enclosing copies)

Total Submitted	Total Printed	Type: LTE, op-ed	Topic	Written By	Paper	Date Ran	It

Other Political or Media Activities Your Chapter Engaged In

Use another sheet if necessary to continue your report. Please detach and return to Erica Tafoya by February 16th so your accomplishments can be published in the next mailing.

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