

**New York Yearly Meeting  
of the Religious Society of Friends**

**Minute on Torture  
(Approved July 25, 2008)**

New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) joins with the voices of people of conscience everywhere to decry the use of torture by the United States and to work for its end.

We acknowledge with deep sorrow and grave concern that our nation engages in torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners and detainees. Our country has developed a system of “interrogation techniques” that, in addition to physical abuse, includes subjecting persons to simulated drowning (“waterboarding”); extremes of temperature, light and noise; sleep deprivation; prolonged “stress positions”; nudity, hunger and thirst; physical, psychological and sexual humiliation; solitary confinement. The International Committee of the Red Cross has observed these detention practices and condemns them as “an intentional system of cruel, unusual and degrading treatment and a form of torture” and as constituting war crimes.<sup>1</sup> Facile denials by our government representatives display arrogance and hypocrisy, and compound our shame. We have diminished our standing among nations and demeaned our moral values as a society and as individuals. The practice of torture by our nation is immoral, unethical and illegal.

Torture betrays our faith. Torture denies the divine Light present in every person. It displaces God’s Love and call for the peaceable Kingdom with violence, hatred, sadism and tyranny. Torture offends Jesus’s command to “love your enemies, do good to them. . . .”<sup>2</sup> It transgresses our belief that we must “not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.’ . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”<sup>3</sup> In the presence of our nation’s use of torture, we hearken to Jesus’s query: “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”<sup>4</sup>

Torture debases our ethical and moral ideals. Torture destroys the humanity of the tortured, the torturer and those who have knowledge of it. “[T]orture plumbs the recesses of human consciousness, unleashing an unfathomable capacity for cruelty as well as seductive illusions of omnipotence.”<sup>5</sup> It fails to defend the sanctity of life and undermines our humanitarian ideals. We believe, with William Penn, that “A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil that good may come of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Torture corrupts our respect for the rule of law and our standing in the community of nations. Torture condemns the innocent and the guilty alike. It is absolutely prohibited under Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,<sup>7</sup> Articles 13, 87 & 89 of the 1949 Geneva Convention III Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War,<sup>8</sup> and the 1977 Protocols thereto, Article 31 of the Geneva Convention IV Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War,<sup>9</sup> and the United Nations Convention Against Torture (1994).<sup>10</sup> It is forbidden by the Eighth Amendment to the United States Constitution, banning the infliction of “cruel and unusual punishments.” It constitutes a war crime. Civilized nations agree that these techniques are immoral and illegal under both American and international law. “[A] nation that sanctions torture in defiance of its democratic principles pays a terrible price. . . . [T]he stigma compromises its majesty and corrupts its integrity. Its officials must spin an ever more complex

web of lies that, in the end, weakens the bond of trust and the rule of law that are the sine qua non of a democracy. And, beyond its borders, allies and enemies turn away in collective revulsion.”<sup>11</sup>

We call on the United States to honor its constitutional and treaty obligations, and our moral, ethical and religious principles, by ending immediately the use of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners and detainees. We direct the Clerk, on behalf of NYYM, to sign on to the National Religious Campaign Against Torture’s *Statement of Conscience* and its *Declaration of Principles* for an executive order banning torture.<sup>12</sup> We encourage Friends and people of conscience everywhere to join us and to work actively to convince Congress and the President to prohibit, and to stop the use of, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners and detainees by any of our representatives, agents or allies.

By not honoring our moral, ethical, spiritual and legal ideals, we endanger our own humanity, as well as the humanity of those involved in the practice of torture or subjected to brutal treatment. We have faith that God’s Light will not be dimmed. Let the United States abolish its use of torture now.

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1. Jane Mayer, *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned Into a War on American Ideals* (Doubleday 2008), pp. 164–65; *New York Times*, July 11, 2008; *New York Times*, November 30, 2004.
  2. Luke 6:35–36 (NIV).
  3. Romans 12: 17–21 (NIV).
  4. Matthew 16:26; Mark 8: 36; Luke 9: 25 (NIV).
  5. Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Henry Holt & Co. 2006), p. 13.
  6. William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude* (1693).
  7. Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that “no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.”
  8. Article 13 of the Geneva Convention III Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War provides that “prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated.” Article 87 prohibits “corporal punishment, imprisonment in premises without daylight and, in general, any form of torture or cruelty.” Article 89 states: “In no case shall disciplinary punishments be inhuman, brutal or dangerous to the health of prisoners of war.”
  9. Article 31 of the Geneva Convention IV Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War provides: “No physical or moral coercion shall be exercised . . . to obtain information from them or from third parties.”
  10. Article I of the United Nations Convention Against Torture defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession.”
  11. McCoy, *A Question of Torture*, p. 14.
  12. See [www.nrcat.org/](http://www.nrcat.org/).