November 18, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
317 Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

cc: Members of the U.S. Senate

Dear Senator,

The undersigned leaders of various faith backgrounds ask you to support sections 1031, 1032, and 1033 of the Senate Armed Services Committee’s version of S. 1197 (the Fiscal Year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act). These provisions, while still restrictive, would allow our government to take practical steps toward drawing down the prisoner population in Guantanamo Bay and eventually closing the detention center.

Although we are of many faiths, we share common convictions which lead us to support closing Guantanamo. First, we believe that torture is morally wrong. Second, both as people of faith and as Americans, we believe that indefinite detention without charge or trial is contrary to the founding values of our country. Guantanamo is a place where prisoners were tortured and where the vast majority of the detainees continue to be held indefinitely without charge or trial. Closing it is the right thing to do.

More than half of the prisoners in Guantanamo have been held there for years despite having been cleared for transfer. Section 1031 would simplify the process of transferring detainees if they are not a threat to the United States or if their transfer is in the national security interest of the United States. It also provides a process for transferring prisoners who, in the future, are determined to no longer pose any threat to the United States. These are reasonable changes and should be supported.

Many of the detainees in Guantanamo face serious threats to their health. Section 1032 allows for temporary transfers for medical treatment when that treatment is necessary to prevent death or imminent significant injury or harm, and it would be excessively costly to treat the detainee in Guantanamo. This is an important humanitarian provision that will also save our country money and should be supported.

The right to a trial is a core American value. Many of the detainees in Guantanamo have been there for over a decade, yet still have no real prospect of facing trial or justice. So far, military commissions have encountered seemingly endless delays and have produced seven convictions at a cost of nearly $600 million. Section 1033 gives the government the option of trying detainees in federal courts when doing so is in the national security interest of the United States.
This is a reasonable provision that may finally lead to the trial of many Guantanamo detainees. It should be supported.

Though limited, these are practical, common sense provisions which place our great nation on the path toward solving the seemingly intractable problems posed by Guantanamo. In an era of austerity, they also provide good stewardship of taxpayer dollars by helping to eliminate wasteful spending. More importantly, they begin to address a serious moral dilemma – our nation cannot be a beacon of liberty and justice while continuing to operate an offshore prison which disregards the rule of law. It is time for us to end this moral crisis.

Please support Sections 1031, 1032, and 1033 of the Senate Armed Services Committee version of S. 1197.

Sincerely,

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley
General Secretary
American Baptist Churches USA

Rev. Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly
The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner
President, The Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

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Christian Reformed Church in North America

Kavneet Singh
General Secretary
World Sikh Council - America Region

Archbishop Vicken Aykazian
Legate
Armenian Church of America

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General Minister and President
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