

# The National Religious Campaign Against Torture

**Torture is a Moral Issue**

# National Religious Campaign Against Torture

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a membership organization committed to end forever torture that is sponsored or impacted by the United States. With over 300 member religious organizations, NRCAT includes representatives from the Catholic, evangelical Christian, mainline Protestant, Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, Orthodox Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh communities.

## **Mission Statement: “Torture is a Moral Issue”**

Torture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, hold dear. It degrades everyone involved—policy-makers, perpetrators and victims. It contradicts our nation’s most cherished ideals. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable.

Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now—without exceptions.

# Who We Are

Since its founding at a conference at Princeton Theological Seminary in January 2006, NRCAT has built an organization with over 300 religious member organizations and more than 58,000 individual people of faith who have engaged in our work. Individuals in our e-network receive information about how to help their congregations and religious organizations engage in efforts to end torture, including public policy advocacy. There are also partner organizations in 19 states.

## **Our goals are:**

- Ending U.S.-sponsored torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of detainees, without exception.
- Working to end torture in U.S. prisons, including the use of prolonged solitary confinement.
- Advocating for U.S. policies and practices that will help end torture by other countries.
- Working to end anti-Muslim sentiment.

## NRCAT's Achievements:

### President Obama's Executive Order

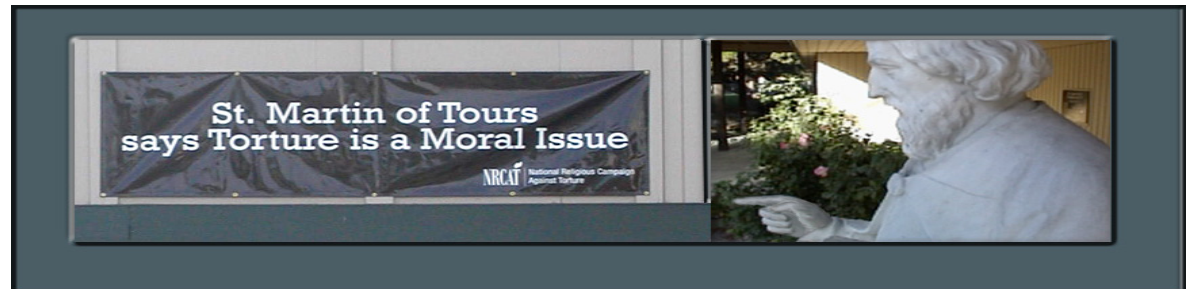
On January 22, 2009, President Obama signed an Executive Order halting torture:

- Throughout 2008 NRCAT joined with Evangelicals for Human Rights and the Center for Victims of Torture to generate support for an executive order to be issued by the President.
- The "Declaration of Principles for a Presidential Executive Order on Prisoner Treatment, Torture and Cruelty" was endorsed by former Secretaries of State, former Secretaries of Defense, high-ranking retired military officers and many individual people of faith. Endorsers included former Secretary of State George Schultz, Ambassador William Taft, former Senator Charles Hagel, former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, and former Secretary of State Warren Christopher.
- NRCAT organized a delegation of 17 religious leaders to meet with the Obama Transition Team just two weeks before the Executive Order was signed.
- While other human rights organizations were involved in similar efforts, NRCAT is generally recognized as having played a significant role in the outcome.

# NRCAT's Achievements: Banners Across America



- More than 350 congregations in all 50 states and the District of Columbia displayed anti-torture banners on the exterior of their buildings during 2008. The *Banners Across America!* project featured messages such as “Torture is Wrong” or “Torture is a Moral Issue.”
- Many congregations have used their banners for special events, including public processions and vigils, and some continue to hang an anti-torture banner as a part of their witness.
- NRCAT produced a colorful poster featuring photographs from congregations, which was given to every member of Congress.



# NRCAT's Achievements:

## Physicians for Human Rights Report

On June 7, 2010, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) released a report providing evidence of unethical and illegal medical experiments on detainees in U.S. custody. NRCAT joined PHR and other human rights organizations in asking the federal government to initiate a formal investigation into the alleged violations of U.S. laws protecting human research subjects. Twenty national religious organizations joined NRCAT in making a complaint against the CIA with the federal Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP). On July 1, OHRP declined to investigate the original complaint and instead referred it to the CIA.

### **Video: *Accounting for Torture***

- With support from the Connect U.S. Fund, NRCAT produced a 5 minute video, *Accounting for Torture*, which was released the same day as the PHR report. NRCAT distributed the video through its e-mail network, FaceBook and iTunes. Several media outlets provided a link to the video in their coverage of the PHR report, and the video generated its own press coverage.

### **Media**

- On June 8, NRCAT held a press conference with Jewish, evangelical Christian, Muslim and mainline Protestant voices describing and analyzing the PHR report.
- Op-eds included “Can Christians Live with Torture?” by Rev. Richard Cizik in the Huffington Post and “Stopping Torture Needs Unswerving Commitment” by Rabbi David Saperstein.
- NRCAT issued several press releases and engaged regional leaders in submitting op-eds to newspapers.

### **Engaging Individuals of Faith Across the U.S.**

- NRCAT provided two model emails for use by individuals across the country. One action alert asked Congress to establish a Commission of Inquiry and the second, after OHRP declined to investigate, asked the Attorney General and President to investigate allegations in the PHR report.
- In June, NRCAT co-sponsored educational events in Seattle, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Chicago, New York City, Princeton, NJ, and Washington, DC.

# NRCAT's Achievements:

## Increasing the Number of People of Faith Who Believe That Torture is Always Wrong

### Outreach to Evangelicals and Catholics

Recognizing the special importance of Evangelicals and Catholics in the U.S. political process at the present time, NRCAT has created a significant infrastructure on which it to continues to build.

- NRCAT placed an ad in the *New York Times* in June 2006 signed by prominent religious leaders including 8 evangelicals and 3 Catholics, among whom were Archbishop Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Rev. Rick Warren, and President Jimmy Carter.
- NRCAT created and raised funds for Evangelicals for Human Rights (EHR) in 2006. EHR was responsible for preparing an 18 page document called “An Evangelical Declaration Against Torture,” which was adopted in March 2007 by the National Association of Evangelicals with a significant amount of media coverage. EHR has engaged in a significant amount of programming with evangelicals including a major conference for evangelicals at Mercer University in Atlanta in 2008. EHR is now incorporated into the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good.
- NRCAT has 51 Catholic organizations as members. To coordinate and enhance the anti-torture work of the Catholic community, NRCAT organized the Catholic Leadership Council (CLC) in 2007. It consists of six major Catholic organizations including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The CLC has produced articles and major programs including a Catholic conference on torture in March 2009.
- Evangelical and Catholic leaders, including the chair of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the USCCB, have signed statements to the White House and the Congress along with other heads of faith groups during the past five years.

# NRCAT's Achievements:

## Increasing the Number of People of Faith Who Believe That Torture is Always Wrong

### Resource Materials for Congregations & Religious Organizations

- In 2009, NRCAT produced *Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever*, a twenty-minute video with a companion study guide produced for various faith groups (Evangelical Christian, Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Unitarian Universalist). More than 500 copies of the study resource have been distributed to religious institutions for their use.
- *Accounting for Torture*, a 5-minute video produced by NRCAT, describes the June 2010 report by Physicians for Human Rights that exposed allegations of illegal and unethical medical experiments performed on detainees.
- *Repairing the Brokenness*, a 10-minute video and discussion guide produced by NRCAT in the spring of 2011, describes the need for accountability for U.S.-sponsored torture and provides information about NRCAT's call for a Commission of Inquiry.
- *Preventing Torture Everywhere*, a 10-minute video and discussion guide produced by NRCAT in the spring of 2011, features four victims of torture; Juan Mendez, U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture; an attorney describing torture and abuse in U.S. prisons; and NRCAT leaders.
- NRCAT produced a curriculum published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.
- NRCAT produced and distributed worship materials including sample prayers and sermons.
- NRCAT developed a lectionary-based resource on torture for Christian clergy to use during Advent.

### Extensive Media Coverage

- NRCAT works vigorously to generate national, regional and local press coverage of its efforts. There were 176 stories in the press concerning NRCAT's activities in 2008, 287 stories in 2009, and 431 stories in 2010. Articles have appeared in a variety of sources, ranging from large national media outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Associated Press*, to smaller, local outlets such as *The Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal*.
- At the national level, NRCAT uses press releases; press conferences with national faith leaders; opinion articles written by national faith leaders for placement in major publications and online blogs; and events of public witness with national faith leaders at the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court.
- Locally, NRCAT has successfully engaged dozens of local faith leaders to write letters to the editor and opinion articles to their local papers, persuaded local Editorial Boards to write editorials in support of NRCAT's goals, and organized and promoted events of public witness.
- Beginning in the summer of 2010, NRCAT has been building a network of letter-to-the editor writers, in the 30 largest cities and the 30 states without one of those cities, who will inform their local communities about torture related issues. There are 73 people in the Letters-to-the-Editor Project.

# NRCAT's Goals and Work in 2011:

## Ending U.S.-sponsored Torture Forever - Torture at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Other Sites

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government implemented a policy that sanctioned government-sponsored torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of detainees. The release in 2009 of the 'torture memos' and President Bush's admission in 2010 that he authorized waterboarding and would do it again made it increasingly clear that the nature and degree of abuses of detainees during the Bush Administration were more widespread and egregious than previously known. Yet, there is still more to be learned and much more to be done to ensure that the necessary safeguards are in place to end permanently U.S.-sponsored torture.

NRCAT is working to:

- Develop support from people of faith for a Commission of Inquiry to investigate U.S.-sponsored torture during the past decade and to recommend safeguards needed to ensure that torture will never happen again. It has:
  - Produced a video called *Repairing the Brokenness*, which describes the need for accountability for U.S.-sponsored torture and provides information about NRCAT's call for a Commission of Inquiry.
  - Produced a statement calling for a Commission of Inquiry that has been signed by 52 senior religious leaders and over 8,000 people of faith.
  - Enabled people of faith across the country to urge the Senate Intelligence Committee to release to the public its comprehensive report on U.S.-sponsored torture.
- Enable people of faith to advocate that the elements of the Executive Order become permanent law. While grateful to President Obama for his Executive Order on January 22, 2009 halting torture, executive orders can be overturned by future presidents.
- Increase the number of people who believe that torture is always wrong. Sadly the polls indicate that approximately 50% of the American people believe that torture is sometimes necessary. NRCAT is working to educate people of faith through its video *Ending U.S.-Sponsored Torture Forever* and other educational materials; equipping its network of partners across the nation to change the minds and hearts of people of faith; providing special opportunities for emphasizing that torture is always wrong like Torture Awareness Month and Human Rights Day on December 10.

# NRCAT's Goals and Work in 2011:

## Ending Torture in U.S. Prisons

The U.S. Constitution bans “cruel and unusual punishment,” and several international treaties that the U.S. has ratified, including the UN Convention Against Torture, specifically prohibit the intentional infliction of severe mental or physical pain and suffering on another person for the purpose of interrogation or punishment. Prolonged solitary confinement is a form of psychological torture with enduring effects, and it should be unequivocally banned in all countries.

In the United States, prolonged solitary confinement is used as punishment in prisons across the country. Prisoners held in such conditions are often confined in a cell by themselves for 23 hours a day for periods lasting weeks, months, years, and even decades. Alarming, some inmates are released from these conditions directly to their families when they complete their prison sentence. NRCAT is working to enable people of faith to advocate for legislation that would limit the use of isolation.

NRCAT is working to:

- Engage faith communities in particular states in efforts to limit the use of solitary confinement, through collaboration with local partners. Through lessons learned from these initial efforts, starting in Maine in 2010 and growing to include Pennsylvania, Oregon, Virginia, Texas and Colorado in 2011, NRCAT is developing best practices for further state-level legislative or administrative campaigns to end long-term solitary confinement.
- Advocate for passage of the National Criminal Justice Commission Act, which would create a commission tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of all aspects of our national criminal justice system.
- Ask the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to investigate the use of prolonged isolation in U.S. “supermax” prisons. NRCAT recently submitted a formal letter of complaint regarding the prolonged isolation of prisoners and will follow-up to encourage an investigation.
- Provide educational materials for people of faith on torture in U.S. prisons and ways to end the practices. NRCAT maintains a web-based resource list of materials related to torture in U.S. prisons. In 2011, NRCAT is producing a video and discussion guide on torture in U.S. prisons.

# NRCAT's Goals and Work in 2011:

## Advocating for U.S. Efforts to End Torture in Other Countries

Torture is practiced by governments across the globe despite prohibitions found in international and national laws. The United States government can use its resources to encourage other countries to reject the use of torture.

In early 2011, NRCAT launched the Preventing Torture Everywhere campaign, a grassroots education and action campaign aimed to increase support for a new treaty, the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, that provides for additional transparency and oversight regarding the treatment of prisoners. Initial resources include a new video with accompanying discussion guide and a petition statement that has been signed by 53 senior religious leaders of many faiths.

NRCAT is working to:

- Urge President Obama to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, a treaty that requires participating nations to create mechanisms to prevent torture from occurring in detention centers, police stations, mental health hospitals, and prisons. It also permits international experts to inspect those facilities.
- Encourage the State Department to prepare a "Torture Watchlist" of countries engaged in torture. Countries on the list that would be determined to be taking steps to end the use of torture would be eligible for aid in those efforts. Countries not taking steps to end their use of torture would face restrictions in aid.
- Advocate for legislation that provides incentives to foreign governments that are making significant efforts to end torture in their countries. One way to do this is to add provisions to the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act that offer positive incentives, including monetary assistance, for initiatives by foreign governments to end torture (such as training local police forces to use humane interrogation techniques).

# NRCAT's Goals and Work in 2011:

## Ending Anti-Muslim Sentiment

One critical factor that led to the U.S. government's use of torture in the last decade was bigotry against Muslims after September 11, 2001. The fact that most of the people detained after September 11 were Muslim allowed our society to view them as "other" and to accept policy changes that allowed torture. Therefore, reducing anti-Muslim sentiment helps ensure that the dignity of each person is respected and that torture is prohibited without exception.

NRCAT is a coalition of Muslims, Christians, Jews, and people from many other faith groups. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), a founding member of NRCAT, has always played an important role in NRCAT's work, along with other Muslim organizations.

In the summer of 2010, the strength of the prejudice against Muslims reached a frightening level with the threatened burning of the Qur'an and the controversy over building a mosque a few blocks from ground zero in New York City. In response, ISNA and NRCAT organized a gathering of heads of faith groups and other senior religious leaders at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, and sponsored a major press conference that produced 200 press stories on September 7. The message of the gathering was that bigotry against Muslims is contrary to the values of all of our faiths and to the values of our nation.

NRCAT is working to:

- End anti-Muslim sentiment through "Shoulder-to-Shoulder: Standing with American Muslims; Upholding American Values," a campaign supported by a coalition of twenty-six national religious organizations. With the leadership of NRCAT and ISNA, Shoulder-to-Shoulder was created in the fall of 2010.
- Respond to events and acts that are marked by anti-Muslim bigotry. On March 10, in response to Rep. Peter King's hearings on the radicalization of Muslims in the U.S., NRCAT assisted Shoulder-to-Shoulder in organizing a major press conference of national religious leaders calling on Rep. King to stop singling out the Muslim community and instead to ask the entire religious community to find ways to make our nation more secure.
- Find ways to strengthen the efforts of local and state religious communities to end anti-Muslim sentiment. Besides organizing the national voice of the religious community, NRCAT, ISNA and Shoulder-to-Shoulder are working to support local and state efforts, including identifying and publicizing best-practices.

# Assets

- Effective relationships with national faith group offices and state ecumenical and interfaith agencies.
- Partner organizations across the country including those in 19 states.
- Capacity for producing materials and programs for use in religious communities.
- An effective history of mobilizing national and state religious bodies and heads of faith groups to endorse particular anti-torture statements.
- Capacity to engage in public policy advocacy efforts.
- Effective collaborative relationships with secular human rights organizations.
- Success in generating press coverage, opinion pieces and letters-to-the editor. 287 press stories in 2009 and 431 in 2010.

# Testimony

“Throughout the world, people of faith can be found on the front lines of the struggle to defend human rights. NRCAT has added an important dimension to the movement to re-establish the norm against torture in the U.S. and to end impunity for those who have espoused its use. We consider NRCAT an important ally in advancing both our public campaigning and our government advocacy against torture, and a powerful voice for change.”

- Larry Cox, Executive Director, Amnesty International USA

“Since its inception, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture has galvanized religious communities throughout the United States to stand up against the torture and cruel treatment of prisoners in U.S. custody. From organizing prominent religious leaders from different faiths to speak out with one voice to mobilizing individual parishes across the country, NRCAT has reminded Americans that torture is a moral issue. That message has been crucial to efforts to end U.S. policies of official cruelty and has helped build a bulwark against return to government policies that devalue human dignity.”

- Elisa Massimino, President and CEO, Human Rights First

“The National Religious Campaign Against Torture adds an invaluable voice in the fight against torture. By framing torture as a moral issue, NRCAT elevates the debate above the politics of the day. Their perspective broadens the appeal and allows them to reach an extensive audience of community and religious leaders. NRCAT also serves an integral role in facilitating coalition building and collaboration among the myriad groups working to end torture and provide accountability.”

- Nan Aron, President, Alliance for Justice

“NRCAT is an important partner in bringing the religious voice to our work to end torture. It is able to speak with a moral authority that enhances and deepens the message of the other human rights organizations.”

-Tom Malinowski, Washington Advocacy Director, Human Rights Watch

# Testimony

“The National Religious Campaign Against Torture is a leader in ending U.S. torture and seeking accountability and we deeply value and benefit from our collaborations with them. My colleagues and I deeply appreciate their extraordinary work in mobilizing individuals and communities of faith to abolish U.S. participation in torture and all forms of cruel and inhuman treatment. Their moral leadership brings the light of hope to this dark time in our nation’s history.”

- Allen S. Keller, Director, Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture

“Having you mobilize religious leaders to oppose torture was one of the turning points of the anti-torture drive and it prevented the Bush Administration from monopolizing the fire-and-brimstone version of religious authority for their torture campaign. Great work!”

-Dr. Kim Lane Schepple, Director, Princeton University’s Program in Law and Public Affairs

“NRCAT has been a vital partner for Physicians for Human Rights in our efforts to promote accountability for U.S. torture of detainees. Working closely with NRCAT has allowed us to reach a much broader audience of concerned Americans and has strengthened the moral dimension of our call for justice and accountability. NRCAT leadership and staff members have been energetic and collegial in approaching our joint initiatives and we look forward to continuing to work with them in what may be a long fight for real accountability for torture.”

- John C. Bradshaw, Washington Director, Physicians for Human Rights

“NRCAT is a force to be reckoned with, combining moral authority with sophisticated and effective advocacy. It is an invaluable ally in our efforts to end solitary confinement and other forms of torture in US prisons.”

- David C. Fathi, Director, ACLU National Prison Project

“Success comes when various voices speak out together. NRCAT effectively organized the religious community so that religious bodies and security and military experts together could say no to torture by calling on President Obama to issue an Executive Order halting torture.”

- Doug Johnson, Executive Director, Center for Victims of Torture

# Why is NRCAT Unique?

Secular human rights organizations can point to United Nations' principles, the Nuremberg Code, and our own Constitution. Only NRCAT addresses torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, based on religious principles. NRCAT is able to approach the public and policy makers from a nonpolitical, spiritual perspective that reaches individuals who may be more responsive to a religious voice.

NRCAT has had success in taking this message into the evangelical and Catholic communities. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good (formerly Evangelicals for Human Rights founded by NRCAT) have been forthright in the opposition to torture.

# Your gift will help NRCAT succeed in its mission to end U.S.-sponsored torture forever

NRCAT has had some significant successes in the last five years. But the work is not finished:

- The elements of President Obama's Executive Order are not permanent. Only legislation can ensure greater permanence.
- There are too many people of faith who believe that torture is sometimes needed.
- The United States does not have a Commission of Inquiry.

NRCAT needs to prepare itself for the transformation from a campaign to a long-term human rights organization.

- We need a sustained and stable funding base.
- We need to pay salaries that are comparable to other human rights organizations to an extraordinarily competent and dedicated staff.
- We need to increase our capacities in development, in creating program for congregations and in media work.

# The Real Question

“The question is not whether laws were broken by the Bush administration and its lawyers. They clearly were. The question is whether we the American people will insist that the laws be enforced.

“What is critical—as a moral, historical, and legal matter—is that we acknowledge in some official manner that what was done in our name was not just a terrible idea, not just an unfortunate mistake whose consequences we will live with for a long, long time. It was illegal and morally wrong.

“Accountability can take many forms. But what is unacceptable is to proceed as if no wrongs were done.”

-- David Cole, Georgetown Law School  
April, 2010

# NRCAT Leadership

## **George Hunsinger** *Founder*

George Hunsinger is the Hazel Thompson McCord Professor of Systematic Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. In January

2006 he founded the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

He is an ordained Presbyterian minister and president of the Karl Barth Society of North America. He is the 2010 recipient of the Karl Barth Prize awarded by the Union of Evangelical Churches in Germany.

He holds degrees from Stanford (A.B., *cum laude*), Harvard Divinity School (B.D., *cum laude*), and Yale (M.A., Ph.D.).

Among his recent books is: *Torture Is a Moral Issue: Christians, Jews, Muslims and People of Conscience Speak Out* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008).



## **Richard Killmer** *Executive Director*

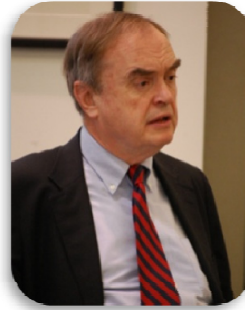
Richard L. Killmer, a Presbyterian minister, is the Executive Director of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture. He was appointed to that position in May of 2007.

In 2002, for his distinguished work with the National Council of Churches, he received the Climate Protection Award from the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

He is a graduate of Franklin and Marshall College and holds two degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary.

He has written numerous articles and co-authored two books.

Mr. Killmer was profiled by *U.S. News and World Report* on March 19, 2010.



## **Linda Gustitus** *President*

Linda J. Gustitus is President of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.

For nearly 25 years she served as Subcommittee Staff Director to Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), eventually becoming his Chief of Staff.

In 2006 she co-founded the Washington Region Religious Campaign Against Torture.

She holds degrees from Oberlin College (B.A.) and Wayne State University Law School (J.D., *cum laude*).

She has been a member of the River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Bethesda, Maryland, for over 20 years.

