

Appeal to our Colleagues in Turkey from American Psychologists: Stand With Us Against Psychologist Involvement in Torture and Detainee Abuse

We understand that a representative of the American Psychological Association has recently issued a statement in Turkey on the APA's policies regarding the United States' government's systematic policy of torture and other detainee abuse. We would like to alert our colleagues in Turkey to the true role of the APA in this sordid chapter of American history.

The APA position that psychologists help keep interrogations "safe, legal, and ethical" defies the evidence. There is not one documented case of a psychologist working to stop abuse ordered or condoned by his or her chain of command. Rather, there is an extensive record of psychologists playing central roles in the development, implementation, standardization, and dissemination of the abusive techniques adopted by the Bush administration.

- Psychologists developed and implemented the CIA's "enhanced interrogations" program.
- Psychologists helped develop the Guantanamo program of psychological abuse, utilizing isolation, sleep deprivation and related tactics to break down detainees. These techniques were adapted from those used by communist nations to brainwash POWs and others into giving false confessions.
- At Guantanamo, BSCT [Behavioral Science Consultation Team] psychologists recommended using detainee weaknesses and isolation to break down detainees. Last month a BSCT psychologist used her right against self-incrimination to refuse to give testimony to the Military Commission in a war crimes trial regarding her illegal, unethical, recommendations for subjecting a detainee to prolonged isolation and other efforts to break him down. These recommendations were in no sense an aberration but were entirely consistent with the Standard Operating Procedures in effect.

Although the APA has passed numerous anti-torture resolutions, the APA has never taken any position critical of the policies of the US government's systematic program of abuse and torture. The Statement made in Turkey states: "The American Psychological Association has adopted a position that has been called a "rebuke" of the Bush administration policy on the use of abusive interrogation techniques" The reason the statement says the APA's position "*has been called a 'rebuke' of the Bush administration*" is because *there are no statements by APA or its leaders rebuking the Bush administration* for its torture policies. Rather, APA spokespersons pretend, against all evidence, that abuses involving psychologists are but the actions of a few individual psychologists acting on their own. This is as false and as disingenuous as the claims of the Bush administration that the horrors at Abu Ghraib were entirely due to abuses by the military police.

When APA formed a task force in 2005 to formulate ethics policy on this issue, they appointed to the task force a majority of military and intelligence psychologists. Four of these members

were in chains of command accused of detainee abuse. The APA still defends that process and the resultant policy.

These are not the actions of a professional organization concerned about ethical conduct of its members, but, rather, the actions of an organization using public relations spin to defend an indefensible policy.

As a further example of APA public relations spin, the statement made in Turkey implies disingenuousness in the position of the American Psychiatric Association because the former President of that association stated that the psychiatrists' position was not enforceable. This ignores the fact, well known to the APA, that the American Psychiatric Association does not conduct ethics enforcement of its members on any matter; enforcement is left to state medical boards. Similarly, an official with the American Medical Association has accused this same APA official in a letter of distorting the AMA's policies.

APA policy does not withstand scrutiny by those closely familiar with it. Many APA members have resigned or withheld dues in protest. Among these are the former Executive Director [and founder] of the APA Practice Directorate and a former Chair of the APA Ethics Committee. This Ethic Committee Chair stated in his resignation letter:

"These changes take APA so far away from its ethical foundation, historic traditions, and basic values, and from my own personal and professional view of our responsibilities, that I cannot support them with my membership. "

Many organizations have carefully examined APA policies and found them wanting. In a public letter, the Nordic Psychological Associations objected to the APA's interrogations policy. The former President of the American Psychiatric Association Steven Sharfstein denounced the APA's interrogations policies. The American Civil Liberties Union has denounced the APA's policies, as has Physicians for Human Rights. And, just this weekend a major newspaper, the *Boston Globe*, denounced the APA policies in an editorial.

We call upon our colleagues in Turkey to stand on the side of ethical psychology and human rights and to denounce the disingenuous and dishonest policies of the APA.

History will not look kindly upon non-governmental organizations like the APA who, in these dark times, abetted the US policies of torture and abuse. Please help change the APA's policies before it is too late and the profession of psychology is irremediably marked with its complicity in torture. We ask psychologists in Turkey and organizations to send open letters of protest to the press and to APA President Alan Kazdin and CEO Norman Anderson. Address these letters to:

Alan Kazdin, PhD, President
Norman Anderson, PhD, CEO and Vice President
American Psychological Association

750 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242
United States of America

Please CC the US Ambassador to Turkey:

Ambassador Ross Wilson
American Embassy Ankara
110 Atatürk Blvd.
Kavaklıdere, 06100 Ankara
Turkey

Please also send copies of the letters to us for distribution to APA members.

We thank our colleagues in Turkey for your solidarity with our struggle for human rights and an ethical psychology.

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for the *Coalition for an Ethical Psychology*

References

Letter from the Nordic Psychological Associations
<http://tinyurl.com/5w7d36>

Letter from Robert M. Slade of the American Medical Association
<http://www.apa.org/monitor/sep06/letters.html>

Physicians for Human Rights letter:
PHR Urges APA To Investigate Psychologists' Role in Torture

<http://physiciansforhumanrights.org/library/letter-2008-08-14.html>

Coalition for an Ethical Psychology

Analysis of the APA FAQ:

http://psychoanalystsopposewar.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/apa_faq_coalition_comments_v12c.pdf

Boston Globe Editorial:

Psychologists and Torture:

http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2008/08/30/psychologists_and_torture/

Soldz & Olson:

A Reaction to the APA Vote on Sealing Up Key Loopholes in the 2007 Resolution on Interrogations

<http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/16711>

Steven Sharfstein [former President, American Psychiatric Association]:

Presidential Address: Advocacy as Leadership

<http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/163/10/1711>

Ken Pope: [former Chair, APA Ethics Committee]:

Why I Resigned from the American Psychological Association

<http://kspope.com/apa/index.php>