



Psychologists for Social Responsibility

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June 21, 2006

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Anne Anderson
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Dr. Gerald Koocher
President, American Psychological Association
750 First St. NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Dr. Koocher,

Enclosed is the latest statement from Psychologists for Social Responsibility regarding the problems with involvement of psychologists in the proceedings taking place at Guantanamo Bay, and at any other secret detention locations around the world.

The Steering Committee of Psychologists for Social Responsibility expresses the following concerns:

- 1) Psychologists not directly involved in the torture of people may, nonetheless, be acting unethically when their participation in the work of an agency that does use practices outside of human rights law serves to give legitimacy or an indication of normality to such practices.
- 2) Given psychological research on the strength of the group's influence on its members, we seriously question whether a few psychologists would be able to "prevent harm to others" in a majority of such situations.
- 3) Psychologists as professionals need to question the assumptions of our leaders or employers regarding the issue of whether a perceived emergency should be cause for a change in humane standards.
- 4) The American Psychological Association is taking an awful hit when its most public presence comes in the form of distinguishing itself from other health care professionals on the basis of its competence in mentally coercive practices that, in this case, are practiced on prisoners whose rights are not protected by the 8th Amendment to the US Constitution.

As is noted in the enclosed statement, "The safest, most principled course of action at this time is for psychologists to refrain from participating in any way in interrogations under these circumstances, to close these prisons, and bring all detainees of all categories back under the umbrella of international human rights laws, treaties, conventions and principles governing their treatment."

Sincerely,

Anne Anderson

Coordinator,

For the PsySR Steering Committee

cc: Casebook/PENS/Ethics committee, APA Board, COR

Psychologists Urge Guantanamo Closure

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) joins many other human rights organizations, and several heads of state, in calling for the closure of the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. PsySR extends its call to include any other prisons maintained by the United States of America where prisoners are incarcerated beyond the bounds of international human rights law. We also call upon our fellow psychologists to refrain from participating in any consultation involving "interrogations" in these prisons.

The risks of abuse of power in coercive situations that are masked in secrecy are well documented and Guantanamo Bay prison is yet another example of such situations. Unfortunately, we also have a number of references from reputable sources, including Pentagon officials (NY Times, June 6, 2006), to the involvement of psychologists in these procedures, particularly as part of the so-called "Behavioral Science Consulting Teams" (BSCTs). We urge adherence to the many international human rights conventions, agreements, principles, and laws that can help protect both the practitioner and those who are at risk of having their human rights violated.

We stand with the United Nations when it reminds us in its report on "Situation of Detainees in Guantanamo Bay" (16-2-2006), that, "Indeed, human rights law applies at all times, even during situations of emergency and armed conflicts" (p. 36). In that report there are several references to violations of international standards by mental health professionals—charges which remain unanswered. Many experts, including Robert Jay Lifton and Stephen N. Xenakis recently (Los Angeles Times, June 8, 2006), have cautioned about the dangers of allowing mental health professionals to become involved in interrogations. They write, "We are keenly aware of the dynamic and consequences of medical misbehavior in custodial settings...."

We also stand with the basic creed for psychologists: Do no harm. We applauded when the American Psychological Association made it clear that "Psychologists may never engage in, facilitate, or countenance torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment." We were therefore most distressed to see that the military is planning to "use only psychologists...to help interrogators devise strategies to get information from detainees at places like Guantanamo Bay, Cuba" (NY Times 6-7-2006).

We join those with serious concerns about the practices being used at Guantanamo Bay. Since we cannot know the nature of the "interrogations" being carried out there, given the secrecy surrounding nearly all aspects of the incarceration of these people, there is no way to guarantee its humaneness.

The safest, most principled course of action at this time is for psychologists to refrain from participating in any way in interrogations under these circumstances, to close these prisons, and bring all detainees of all categories back under the umbrella of international human rights laws, treaties, conventions and principles governing their treatment.

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) is a non-profit organization dedicated to using psychological knowledge to build a culture of peace with justice. Born in 1982, PsySR applies the research, knowledge, and practices of psychology to promote durable peace at the community, national and international levels. Its Steering Committee of psychologists leads an organization with members in almost every state of the Union, and in more than 40 countries.

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