

COALITION FOR AN ETHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Coalition Endorses Recommendations of New Report on Health Professional Involvement in Torture, Calls for APA Action

The [Coalition for an Ethical Psychology](#) applauds the release yesterday of an important new report titled "[Ethics Abandoned: Medical Professionalism and Detainee Abuse in the War on Terror](#)," funded by the Institute on Medicine as a Profession (IMAP) and the Open Society Foundations. The report from a distinguished panel of military, medical, public health, legal, and ethics experts provides a detailed account of the unethical involvement of health professionals – including psychologists – in abusive and torturous U.S. detention and interrogation operations.

The IMAP report, which follows a similar bipartisan report on detainee treatment from [The Constitution Project](#), offers clear and feasible recommendations for urgent reforms that professional associations, including the American Psychological Association (APA), should now pursue. The Coalition strongly supports these recommendations calling upon health professionals to put ethical considerations at the center of any involvement in national security work. Unfortunately, the APA [press release](#) in response to the IMAP report falls well short of the transparency and engagement called for in the report. The APA overstates and misrepresents its current efforts in at least three critical ways:

1. The IMAP report calls for fact-finding investigations and disciplinary action against psychologists who have violated ethical standards. The APA, however, has failed to adequately address ethics complaints brought against APA members for their alleged involvement in the torture and abuse of prisoners at Guantánamo Bay. In particular, the APA quickly dismissed without meaningful investigation a complaint against Larry James, former chief BSCT psychologist at Guantánamo. Furthermore, a complaint filed over six years ago against John Leso, also a former Guantanamo BSCT psychologist, still remains unadjudicated by the APA's ethics office. The APA press release ignores these complaints.
2. In its response to the IMAP report, the APA press release refers to the 2008 Referendum as an organizational accomplishment. However, this policy was the result of grassroots membership efforts opposed by the APA leadership. The Referendum prohibits psychologists from working in national security settings, such as Guantánamo and the CIA's secret prisons, which violate international law or the U.S. Constitution. But to date the APA has failed to take meaningful action to implement and enforce the prohibitions. Psychologists continue to serve at Guantánamo.
3. The IMAP report recommends that APA "repudiate the report of its Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security" (the PENS Report). The APA press release misleadingly asserts that the recent adoption of its "reconciled policy" on anti-torture resolutions and the rescission of the PENS Report represent steps consistent

with this recommendation. But in this context *repudiation* and *rescission* are quite different. In fact, the APA ensured that the new document does *not* change Association policy in any way and merely incorporates PENS policies while officially rescinding the report. Most notably, the reconciled policy does not forbid psychologists from continuing to participate in the national security interrogations and related military operations that the IMAP report highlights as violating accepted professional ethics standards. As well, there has been no official acknowledgment, repudiation, or accountability by the APA in regard to the corruption of institutional process associated with the creation and functioning of the PENS Task Force.

To adequately respond to the important recommendations of the IMAP report, the Association must adjudicate the pending ethics complaints against BSCT psychologists and make certain that such cases are properly handled in the future. The APA must fully work to implement the Referendum policy and acknowledge that places like Guantánamo Bay and other national security detention settings violate U.S. and international law. The APA must also repudiate the PENS Report, which continues to raise serious questions about the Association's independence from the military/intelligence establishment on matters of professional ethics. These are just several steps in policy and organizational reform that would help ensure that the ethical, human rights, and legal violations cited in the IMAP and other reports will never occur again. We call upon all psychologists, APA members and non-members alike, to pressure the Association to take these steps.

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