

COALITION FOR AN ETHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

human rights * ethics * social justice

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Coalition Responds to Constitution Project Report on Detainee Treatment

April 17, 2013

Dear Colleagues,

Yesterday the independent and nonpartisan Constitution Project released its [Task Force Report on Detainee Treatment](#). The comprehensive report was developed over a period of more than two years, in order to “provide an accurate and authoritative account of how the United States treated people its forces held in custody as the nation mobilized to deal with a global terrorist threat.”

Chapter 6 of the report – “The Role of Medical Professionals in Detention and Interrogation Operations” – includes a review of the role of psychologists. The Report documents – in no uncertain terms – that psychologists “helped create interrogation techniques for use in questioning detainees” and that many of these techniques “constituted torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.” The Report also confirms that psychologists “participated variously in interrogations by monitoring certain interrogations, providing or allowing to be provided medical information on detainees to interrogators, and not reporting abuses.”

Included as well is a critical appraisal of the American Psychological Association’s 2005 [“PENS Report”](#) on psychological ethics and national security. The Report on Detainee Treatment notes that the PENS Task Force, while asserting that it is ethical for psychologists to consult to national security interrogations, declined to “render any judgment concerning events that may or may not have occurred in national security-related settings.” The new Report also makes it clear that the PENS Task Force was dominated by members actively engaged with military/intelligence agencies and that several of these members had prior knowledge of psychologists’ involvement in abusive and torturous interrogations. This crucial knowledge was withheld from those members of the PENS Task Force not involved in national security operations or research, and it did not inform the PENS deliberations. Michael Wessells, who ultimately resigned from the PENS Task Force, is cited in the Report on Detainee Treatment as stating that he came to regard PENS as “predominantly a national security establishment operation” rather than a “representative dialogue” of psychologists.

As members of the [Coalition for an Ethical Psychology](#), we believe that the release of the Constitution Project’s Report on Detainee Treatment is an appropriate opportunity to reiterate our call for annulment and repudiation of the APA’s PENS Report. We have previously detailed the flawed and illegitimate nature of the PENS process and Report in both a [Background Statement](#) and a [Draft Resolution](#). Our [online PENS Annulment Petition](#) has already garnered endorsement from over thirty organizations, including Physicians for Human Rights, the ACLU, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, several divisions of the APA, and over 2,200 individuals including U.S. and international health professionals, social scientists, human rights

scholars and activists, habeas attorneys, and concerned military and intelligence professionals.

Almost eight years have now passed since the highly consequential PENS Report was produced, over the course of a single weekend. A serious and thorough accounting is long overdue and indispensable in order to restore the ethical foundations of the profession we hold dear. The consolidation of current APA policy into a single document, as recently recommended by the APA's "Member-Initiated Task Force," is wholly inadequate, in part because it fails to acknowledge, examine, or redress the misguided priorities and flawed decision-making of APA's leadership.

The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology therefore again calls for annulment of the PENS Report. At the same time, we renew our invitation for APA divisions and other concerned organizations and groups to endorse our [online PENS Annulment Petition](#), and we encourage you to join us in publicizing the opportunity for individuals to add their signatures as well. If you have already signed on, we thank you for your support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Roy Eidelson
Jean Maria Arrigo
Trudy Bond
Brad Olson
Steven Reisner
Stephen Soldz

Sign the PENS Annulment Petition Here: www.ethicalpsychology.org/pens