

*****NEWS RELEASE*****
from
COALITION FOR AN ETHICAL PSYCHOLOGY
PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR AN ETHICAL APA

American Psychological Association Members Pass Historic Ban on Psychologist Participation in U.S. Detention Facilities

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Today, the membership of the American Psychological Association (APA) passed a referendum banning participation of APA member psychologists in U.S. detention facilities, such as Guantanamo or the CIA's secret "black sites" operating outside of or in violation of international law or the Constitution. The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology congratulates our colleagues, and in particular, we congratulate the referendum authors – Dan Aalbers, Brad Olson, and Ruth Fallenbaum – as well as the activists withholding dues and otherwise protesting professional collusion with unethical behavior.

Dan Aalbers, one of the referendum's authors, stated: "This is a decisive victory for the membership of the APA and for human rights advocates everywhere. This new policy will ensure that psychologists work for the abused and not the abusers at places like Guantanamo Bay and the CIA black sites. We expect that the APA's leadership will immediately take action to ensure that psychologists are removed from the chain of command at places where human rights are violated or said not to apply."

In recent years revelations from the press, Congress, and Defense Department documents revealed that psychologists have played a central role in Bush administration detainee abuse. These reports conclusively demonstrate that psychologists designed, implemented, disseminated, and standardized detention and interrogation practices that frequently amounted to torture.

The passage of this referendum constitutes a decisive repudiation of the APA leadership's long-standing policy encouraging psychologist participation in interrogations and other activities in military and CIA detention facilities that have repeatedly been found to violate international law and the Constitution. In 2005, the APA's orchestrated Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security [PENS] declared that psychologists' participation in interrogations

in these sites helped keep interrogations there "safe, legal, an ethical." Although APA followed this report with resolutions ostensibly condemning participation in torture, the resolutions continued to permit psychologists to serve in sites where human rights are routinely violated. The APA membership has now rejected APA policy in favor of one refusing psychologist participation in the running of detention facilities operating against the law and professional ethics.

"For years APA leadership has insisted that our professions' contributions to the Bush administration detentions made things better. It turns out that the APA membership wasn't convinced" said Stephen Soldz, a psychologist on the faculty of the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis and a founder of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology.

Passage of the referendum culminates years of struggle by numerous APA members to change policies that conflict with the best traditions of psychology as a profession. The referendum is a clear statement that APA members take seriously the professions' highest ethical aspiration: "Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm." Members are not willing to continue colluding with the Bush administration's systematic policies of detainee abuse that often amount to torture.

Referendum proponents collected over 1,000 signatures, forcing APA to submit the policy change to a mail ballot of the entire membership. The ballots went out on August 1 and votes received as of Monday, September 15th were counted. The referendum passed with 8,792 [58.8%] YES votes to 6,157 votes against. The turnout was the highest ever in APA history.

"With this vote APA members have taken a major step toward restoring unimpeachable ethical standards by prohibiting its members from participating at sites that violate human rights and international law. But until APA communicates this new policy to the White House, the Department of Defense and the CIA, the abuses might continue. We must assure that the policy is implemented quickly" said Steven Reisner, a New York psychologist who is running for APA President.

Passage of the referendum is an important first step in righting APA policies that have cast shame upon the profession. The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology calls upon APA to take additional steps to turn the organization around.

- Although the referendum pulls psychologists out of detention sites where human rights are being violated, we call upon APA to take a further step and put APA policy in line with that of the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association and ban psychologists from any direct role in the interrogation of specific individuals in any national security setting.
- We call upon the APA to initiate and fund an independent panel to investigate and create a public record regarding the participation of U.S. psychologists in torture and other detainee abuse. The panel should also investigate organizational, policy, and ethical policies contributing to this abuse and make recommendations for change.

- The APA should proceed expeditiously to modify its ethics code to remove clauses allowing ethical violations when psychological ethics are in conflict with "law, regulations, or other governing legal authority."
- The APA should act quickly on ethics complaints against psychologists reported to have contributed to U.S. torture and detention abuses.
- Finally, the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology calls upon APA members to follow up this victory by electing a President, Steven Reisner, who is steadfastly committed to ending psychologist collusion with detainee abuse.

The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology includes Jean Maria Arrigo, Brad Olson, Steven Reisner, Stephen Soldz, and Bryant Welch

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