

Religious foes of torture want culprits pursued: Appointment of special prosecutor is not enough

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Religious antitorture groups said the release last month of a partially declassified 2004 CIA report on treatment of terrorism suspects justified their critique of Bush administration policies on detainee treatment.

But they also said the decision by the Justice Department to appoint a special prosecutor to probe alleged CIA interrogation abuses doesn't go far enough in pursuing those who authorized and oversaw harsh treatment of terrorism suspects in U.S. custody.

"The [CIA] inspector general's report adds to the condemning facts already known about detainee abuse in U.S. prisons and facilities by describing threats of imminent death made against detainees and the staging of mock executions in order to coerce confessions or gain intelligence," said a statement from Evangelicals for Human Rights reacting to the report's release on August 24.

"Its description of cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment employed by CIA interrogators in the years following the horrible attacks of 9/11 clearly shows torture," the statement continued. "This is a moral failure by our nation as we have disregarded the tradition of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln of treating detainees, in all manners of war, with fairness and even respect."

The partially declassified report—which the Obama administration was forced to release in response to an American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit—was written by the CIA inspector general's office in May 2004 and detailed how U.S. officials and contractors treated terrorism suspects in the frantic intelligence-gathering period after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The report revealed several examples of tactics that went beyond even the harsh techniques for which Bush administration lawyers had provided controversial legal justification. They included:

- Telling detainees that their family members would be hurt or killed unless they complied with interrogators.
- Staging mock executions to convince suspects that they could be killed unless they provided requested information to interrogators.
- Excessive use of waterboarding, or simulated drowning. One high-value suspect—al-Qaeda operative Khalid Sheikh Mohammed—was waterboarded a total of 183 times, according to the report.
- Menacing one detainee with a power drill while he stood naked and hooded.

The same day that the report was released, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said he had appointed longtime federal prosecutor John Durham to begin a preliminary investigation of several alleged CIA abuses of detainees and terrorism suspects, including some that ended in death.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture released a statement saying that the CIA report detailed “horrific abuse” and calling for an inquiry into possible torture that would be more comprehensive than Holder’s investigation.

“Our country will not end this sordid chapter of American history until we understand the full nature of U.S.-sponsored torture and put safeguards in place to make sure that U.S.-sponsored torture never happens again,” the statement said. “It is our responsibility to assure that future generations of Americans grow up in a country that does not torture.” *-Associated Baptist Press*