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PHR Welcomes APA's Call to Remove Psychologists from Guantánamo and National Security Interrogations

Recommend 72

New York, NY - 10/30/2015

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) today welcomed the American Psychological Association's (APA) [request](#) that the U.S. government withdraw all psychologists from national security interrogation roles and from Guantánamo Bay and other detention settings

that operate in violation of international law. PHR urged the Obama administration to comply with the APA's new ethics policy and to close Guantánamo and end indefinite detention.

"The APA's letters send a clear message to the U.S. government that the psychology profession unequivocally rejects policies of torture and abuse, and they set appropriate limits on what psychologists can do in national security contexts," said Dr. Stephen Soldz, PHR's anti-torture advisor. "Psychology as a profession is based upon an ethical duty to 'do no harm.' National security interrogations, even ones which are not torturous, violate that duty. The government should respect professional ethics and not ask military psychologists to violate APA policy, even in service of their country."

The APA [sent official correspondence](#) yesterday to President Obama, the Pentagon, CIA, Congress, and other federal entities, informing them of [new policy changes](#) adopted at the association's annual meeting in August in Toronto. The APA called the letters the "first major step" in implementing the policy and asked the U.S. government to take the following actions:

1. Withdraw psychologists from any role in national security interrogations or conditions of confinement that might facilitate such interrogations;
2. Discontinue citing the 2005 Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS), which is rescinded, in any government documents referring to psychologists' role in national security interrogations;
3. Redeploy all psychologists working in detention settings that violate the U.S. Constitution or international law, unless they are exclusively treating military personnel or working directly for detainees or independent third parties protecting human rights; and
4. Withdraw U.S. understandings and reservations to the U.N. Convention against Torture.

PHR said that the APA's communication to the Obama administration was a welcome sign of the association's renewed commitment to human rights, following a decade of policies and practices that enabled psychologists to participate in abusive interrogations and lend a façade of legitimacy to detainee torture. In July, an [independent review](#) by former federal prosecutor David Hoffman confirmed that APA officials had colluded with the Defense Department and the CIA in connection with the post-9/11 torture program. The APA's adoption of the interrogation ban in August was a [resounding rejection](#) of complicity in human rights

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violations, said PHR.

"The APA letters signal a return by the association to the psychology profession's dedication to respecting the dignity and improving the welfare of people everywhere," said Sarah Dougherty, PHR's senior anti-torture fellow. "With this action, the APA recognizes that the psychology profession should return to its core ethical values. It is now up to the U.S. government to recognize that psychologists in its employ are still psychologists subject to the ethics and policies of the profession."

Since 2005, PHR has documented the systematic use of detainee torture by U.S. personnel in [a series of groundbreaking reports](#). PHR has repeatedly called for an end to the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, an end to indefinite detention without trial, the closure of Guantánamo, a federal investigation into the role of health professionals in the U.S. torture program, and full criminal and professional accountability for any health professionals involved.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is a New York-based advocacy organization that uses science and medicine to stop mass atrocities and severe human rights violations. [Learn more here.](#)



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