



# AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

June 18, 2009

## **An Open Letter from the Board of Directors**

Dear Colleague,

As a psychologist and member of the American Psychological Association (APA), you no doubt share our serious concerns about reports regarding the involvement of psychologists in torture and abusive interrogations as part of the Bush administration's "war on terror." We recognize that the issue of psychologist involvement in national security-related investigations has been an extremely difficult and divisive one for our association. We also understand that some of our members continue to be disappointed and others angered by the association's actions in this regard. Although APA has had a longstanding policy against psychologist involvement in torture, many members wanted the association to take a strong stand against any involvement of psychologists in national security interrogations during the Bush administration.

Information has emerged in the public record confirming that, as committed as some psychologists were to ensuring that interrogations were conducted in a safe and ethical manner, other psychologists were not. Although there are countless psychologists in the military and intelligence community who acted ethically and responsibly during the post-9/11 era, it is now clear that some psychologists did not abide by their ethical obligations to never engage in torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The involvement of psychologists, no matter how small the number, in the torture of detainees is reprehensible and casts a shadow over our entire profession. APA expresses its profound regret that any psychologist has been involved in the abuse of detainees.

This has been a painful time for the association and one that offers an opportunity to reflect and learn from our experiences over the last five years. APA will continue to speak forcefully in further communicating our policies against torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment to our members, the Obama administration, Congress, and the general public. In so doing, we will continue to highlight our 2008 petition resolution policy, Psychologists and Unlawful Detention Settings with a Focus on National Security. APA will ensure that association communications convey clearly that the petition resolution is official association policy

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and must be central to psychologists' assessment of the appropriateness of their roles in specific work settings related to national security. Our association's governing body, the Council of Representatives, will soon be receiving guidance from various governance groups regarding further steps to implement this resolution. The history of APA positions and actions related to detainee welfare and professional ethics can be found at <http://www.apa.org/releases/timeline.html>.

On a closely related matter, the Ethics Committee and APA governance as a whole are focused intently on Ethics Code Standards 1.02 and 1.03, which address conflicts between ethics and law and between ethics and organizational demands, respectively. In light of Bush administration interrogation policies and uncertainty among our membership, the Ethics Committee has issued the attached statement, "No defense to torture under the APA Ethics Code" (<http://www.apa.org/releases/ethics-statement-torture.pdf>). Invoking language from the U.N. Convention Against Torture, this statement clarifies that the Ethics Committee "will not accept any defense to torture in its adjudication of ethics complaints." APA will continue to monitor material in official reports related to psychologist mistreatment of national security detainees, will investigate reports of unethical conduct by APA members, and will adjudicate cases in keeping with our Code of Ethics. The association's focus on these ethical standards is consistent with its position that no psychologist involved in detainee abuse should escape accountability.

In conclusion, as part of APA's elected leadership, we have an obligation to protect and further psychology's longstanding commitment to the highest standards of professional ethics—including, and especially, the protection of human welfare.

Respectfully,

American Psychological Association 2009 Board of Directors

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