



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

April 28, 2009

President Barack Obama
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C.

Dear President Obama,

From our positions in the national religious and human rights movements, we have watched and read with horror, shame, and anger the new reports about atrocities committed by our country's representatives in the name of national security. The accounts underscore the urgent need for action. We hope you will fully support ending all forms of U.S.-sponsored torture and help restore America's tarnished image.

The release of internal memos revealing and documenting the extensive use of torture and its questionable legal underpinnings reaffirms the need for an independent commission of inquiry into the full extent of U.S.-sponsored torture, especially as part of the post-9/11 political and diplomatic environment of the past eight years.

Throughout this dark period of our recent history, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) and the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) have consistently taken a strong stance against torture under any circumstances and under any administration. Among other reasons, the use of torture is antithetical to our nation's cherished ideals – the mere suspicion that our government engaged in this practice has done incalculable damage to our nation's standing. With the release of these memoranda, that suspicion has hardened into certainty. Moreover, U.S.-sponsored torture clearly encourages reciprocal treatment against our own troops and spreads anti-American hatred.

Under your new leadership, we are now at a critical turning point in our nation's history and have the hope of reclaiming our reputation as the moral leader of the free world. At this juncture, it is especially important for you to appreciate the increasing public sentiment insisting that those responsible for authorizing the use of cruel and inhumane treatment of detainees be held accountable for their actions. It is not enough simply to promise to stop doing what we know is immoral and illegal. We must show that we mean it when we say "never again" by making public the full story, including how the horrific practices came to happen, and who was responsible for authorizing them.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE

689 Massachusetts Avenue | Cambridge, MA 02139 | 617-868-6600 | info@uusc.org | www.uusc.org

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS

25 Beacon Street | Boston, MA 02108 | 617-742-2100 | info@uua.org | www.uua.org

UUSC and the UUA have collaborated over the past several years in UUSC's STOP Campaign (Stop Torture Permanently) in calling for an end to U.S.-sponsored torture. We also are founding members of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) and supporters of the Washington-based Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC).

Along with NRCAT, currently headed by Linda Gustitus, a Unitarian Universalist from Washington, D.C., and TASSC, we supported your executive orders to ban torture and close the detention center in Guantanamo Bay as important first steps. But this is only a beginning, and it is now abundantly clear that an investigation and full disclosure of recent U.S. policy and behavior is needed. We hope that your encouraging public statements will be followed by decisive action to investigate the full extent of the use of torture and to hold accountable all high-level decision makers as well as others responsible for flagrant violations of U.S. and international laws against torture.

As we move to help restore our nation's reputation, we will urge all of our political leaders, including members of Congress, to take strong measures to ensure an investigation marked by truth, full disclosure, and accountability. For our part, we are encouraging Unitarian Universalist congregations to build on their history of advocacy by endorsing the NRCAT call for a Commission of Inquiry. We also urge all constituents and supporters to step up the pressure on our national policymakers to ensure that ending all forms of torture or inhumane treatment remains a top priority of our national government.

We look forward to supporting your efforts in turning a new page in the history of how our country respects the human rights and basic dignity to which, in our democracy, all individuals are entitled.

Yours in peace and justice,



Charlie Clements
President and CEO
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
Cambridge, Massachusetts



Rev. William Sinkford
President
Unitarian Universalist Association
Boston, Massachusetts

CC: The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
The Honorable John Conyers
The Honorable Harry Reid
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Honorable John Boehner