

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

PsySR Calls for An Independent National Investigation of the American Psychological Association and Its Role in Supporting the Involvement of Psychologists in Harsh National Security Interrogations

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) has called for an independent national commission to fully investigate U.S. torture and prisoner abuse under the Bush Administration. We include in that call for the commission to determine whether the American Psychological Association (APA) – the largest association of psychologists worldwide – knowingly cooperated with the Department of Defense and the CIA in helping to plan, facilitate, provide official justification for, or hide the use of harsh interrogation methods.

We do not call for this investigation of the APA lightly – and we do not prejudge what such a commission might learn or conclude. We are mindful of APA's work to improve understanding and human welfare in many fields of psychology. But many psychologists and other clinical professionals seek answers to why the APA, committed by its charter to promote the highest professional ethics for its members, did not act with vigor against psychologists' involvement in abusive interrogations and torture – and in numerous instances appeared to do the opposite. Here we highlight six illustrative questions that we believe merit further investigation by an independent commission:

- Did the APA's 2005 Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS) provide an independent evaluation – without outside interference – of the ethics of psychologists' participation in these interrogations?
- Has the APA responded appropriately and adequately to official ethics complaints registered against APA members regarding their involvement in abusive interrogations?
- Was the APA's sponsorship of post-9/11 invitation-only workshops with security agencies such as the CIA consistent with its "do no harm" core principles?
- Why did the APA adopt unrealistic assumptions about the impact and autonomy of psychologists present in detainee settings in spite of well-known psychological research to the contrary?
- Have financial and career considerations – such as the funding of psychological research and practice by the defense-intelligence establishment – influenced APA actions and policies in regard to psychologists' participation in abusive interrogations?
- What was the basis for the APA's revision of Standard 1.02 of its Ethics Code in 2002 to the effect that psychologists may ignore the code where it conflicts with the regulations of an undefined "governing authority" – and why was this standard not modified after APA Council identified its potential to allow for torture?

In conclusion, we regret that the APA has not seen fit over the past several years to investigate itself. We also regret that so many psychologists have been forced to dedicate extensive efforts to obtain such limited and inconsistent information from a very resistant APA leadership. Given the evidence received from diverse sources, we believe an independent national investigation is an absolute necessity in ensuring that members of the American psychological community do not find themselves repeating their involvement in such widespread human rights abuses ever again.