

# PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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## **PsySR Supports APA Post-Hoffman Reforms**

A year has now passed since an independent review confirmed allegations of collusion between American Psychological Association (APA) officials and national security establishment representatives to guarantee that APA policy would not constrain psychologists' involvement in military or CIA war-on-terror detention and interrogation operations, at a time when those operations were known to be abusive. For the APA, the Hoffman Report ended more than a decade of denials and stonewalling—a dark period during which APA members participated in the design and implementation of the CIA's black-site torture program and the treatment of Guantánamo detainees described as “tantamount to torture” by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In light of these disturbing revelations, Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) and other social justice groups have called for the APA to undertake a rehabilitative project of transparency, accountability, and reform. The Hoffman Report has finally spurred a long overdue reconsideration by APA's leadership of past decisions that prioritized guild interests over human rights and professional ethics. One valuable initiative in this arena has been the passage of Resolution 23B. This resolution bans psychologists from involvement in national security interrogations; adopts the determinations of the United Nations in establishing what constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; and prohibits psychologists from working at international sites that violate international law unless they are working directly on behalf of the detainees or providing treatment to military personnel.

However, in recent months these crucial efforts have come under increasing attack from parties with vested interests in casting doubt on the Hoffman Report's conclusions and in returning APA policy to the status quo ante. Participants in this delegitimization campaign include key individuals directly involved in the documented collusion; several past presidents of the APA and past chairs of the APA's Ethics Committee, most of whom served during the period of collusion; and the leadership of the APA's military psychology division, which has long advocated for psychologist participation in specific operational roles that raise challenges for the profession's do-no-harm standard. While these individuals and groups are entitled to argue their case, fellow psychologists and the general public should not overlook the biases, potential conflicts of interest, and personal histories that may be relevant to their obstructionist stance today.

At this time, PsySR wishes to reiterate its strong support for steps aimed at strengthening the APA's commitment to human rights and professional ethics in all settings, including national security contexts. Toward that end, PsySR joined other human rights groups in presenting APA leaders with a specific set of 22 [recommended action steps](http://www.psysr.org/apa-recommendations) (www.psysr.org/apa-recommendations) during a meeting earlier this year in Washington, DC. Several of these recommendations are worth highlighting here.

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First, to protect the viability of long overdue reforms prioritizing human rights and ethics, PsySR urges the current APA leadership to resist misleading efforts that disparage the independence and legitimacy of the Hoffman Report and its findings. We likewise encourage the APA to remain steadfast in supporting Resolution 23B and in advocating for compliance with its prohibitions—prohibitions that should be understood to be enforceable standards of the Ethics Code.

Second, PsySR urges the APA to issue a formal public apology—one that promotes dignity and healing—to all who have been harmed by the APA's role in enabling detainee abuses. In addition, APA should use its resources to help former detainees and their families obtain appropriate mental health care as part of their right to rehabilitation. We therefore encourage the APA to make regular and substantial financial contributions to the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture or other foundations with similar purposes.

Third, military psychologists at Guantánamo are linked to a coercive and unlawful detention regime, one that precludes therapeutic relationships based on trust. PsySR therefore urges the APA to call for the Department of Defense to allow psychologists who are independent of the military chain-of-command to provide mental health services to these detainees and to evaluate their conditions of confinement. We also encourage the APA to publicly advocate for a thorough review of the Army Field Manual and for removal of Appendix M, which permits abusive detention and interrogation practices—including sleep deprivation, sensory deprivation, and solitary confinement—that are still in use and are widely recognized as constituting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, if not outright torture.

Fourth, to help restore the psychology profession's integrity and the public's trust, PsySR urges the APA to pursue accountability, where appropriate, for staff and members who were implicated in the collusion documented in the Hoffman Report. We further encourage the APA to remove statutes of limitation and other procedural barriers that may illegitimately obstruct full committee review and adjudication of ethics complaints alleging involvement of psychologists in torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment in the context of national security operations.

Finally, PsySR recommends that the APA, in collaboration with scientific and human rights organizations, prepare and broadly disseminate guidance that clearly explains the ways in which psychological ethics can diverge from military ethics and related directives and legal standards. We also urge the APA to establish an independent task force to review the APA's ties to U.S. military and intelligence agencies and to recommend best practices for evaluating and monitoring such relationships. Central to this work should be determining how the profession's human rights and ethics priorities might be effectively protected from manipulation and undue influence by national security interests.

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