

SSCP Executive Board Statement Against Torture

September 9, 2009

We, the Executive Board of the Society for a Science of Clinical Psychology (Division 12, Section III of the American Psychological Association), hereby (1) declare our unequivocal condemnation of any involvement of psychologists in torture or abusive treatment of prisoners, including such actions that may be disguised under the euphemism of "enhanced or harsh interrogation" techniques, (2) express our serious concern about individual and systemic factors that may have contributed to any such involvement, and (3) recommend corrective action to hold all relevant parties accountable and reduce the likelihood of any involvement of psychologists in such behaviors in the future.

It has become increasingly apparent that at least a few psychologists likely were involved in the design, implementation, justification, and/or concealment of torture or abusive treatment of prisoners. Regardless of the number of psychologists involved, such actions are clearly in violation of the principles of the American Psychological Association (APA) Ethics code: "Psychologists strive to benefit those with whom they work and take care to do no harm... Because psychologists' scientific and professional judgments and actions may affect the lives of others, they are alert to and guard against personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead to misuse of their influence" (*Principle A: Beneficence and Nonmaleficence*); "Psychologists exercise reasonable judgment and take precautions to ensure that their potential biases, the boundaries of their competence, and the limitations of their expertise do not lead to or condone unjust practices" (*Principle D: Justice*); "Psychologists are aware that special safeguards may be necessary to protect the rights and welfare of persons or communities whose vulnerabilities impair autonomous decision making" (*Principle E: Respect for People's Rights and Dignity*).

We therefore make the following recommendations:

1. APA should make an immediate, complete, and public declaration of any information the organization possesses regarding the role of psychologists or psychological associations in the design, implementation, justification, and/or concealment of torture or abusive treatment of prisoners. Such information should be provided specifically to the membership of APA, to the State licensing boards of any individual psychologists named in the declaration who may have been involved in such actions, and to federal law enforcement authorities, so that appropriate legal and ethical judgments can be made.
2. Upon receipt of such information, we recommend that State licensing boards and federal law enforcement authorities conduct their own independent investigations of whether the psychologists' actions constitute an ethical or legal violation.
3. If APA asserts that no such information is available, the organization should declare any complaints regarding such actions that it and its committees or other organizational units have declined to accept or to take action on, and should make public what steps the organization took or is taking to discover what role, if any, psychologists and psychological associations have played in the design, implementation, justification, and/or concealment of torture or abusive treatment of prisoners.
4. APA Council should move immediately to retract the 2002 revision of Section 1.02 of the APA Ethics Code, which added a sentence inconsistent with the broader principles of the

Ethics Code, specifically, the second sentence of the following passage: *"If psychologists' ethical responsibilities conflict with law, regulations, or other governing legal authority, psychologists make known their commitment to the Ethics Code and take steps to resolve the conflict. If the conflict is unresolvable via such means, psychologists may adhere to the requirements of the law, regulations, or other governing legal authority."*

5. A direct result of the retraction of Section 1.02 should be to declare immediately null and void the report of the Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (PENS), which is partially predicated on the revised Ethics Code. A new Task Force should be assembled to determine APA's policy on interrogations; this process should include an open forum, including full discussion of the issues by the APA membership.
6. An independent, nonpartisan commission should be created to investigate fully the specific role of individual psychologists, their subordinates, and psychological organizations, including the American Psychological Association, in the design, implementation, justification, or concealment of torture or abusive treatment of prisoners.