

Against Torture

ON NOVEMBER 28, A GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN INTELLECTUALS PRESENTED THE MANIFESTO "AGAINST TORTURE" AT THE FERIA INTERNACIONAL DEL LIBRO IN GUADALAJARA MEXICO TOGETHER WITH A BOOK ON THE USE OF TORTURE IN LATIN AMERICA, AND ALSO IN THE SO CALLED WAR ON TERRORISM: CONTRA LA TORTURA (E. Subirats (editor) - Editorial Fineo, Mexico).

THIS MANIFESTO HAS RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION IN THE SPANISH SPEAKING MEDIA, BUT NONE OUTSIDE ITS BORDERS.

12/11/06 "Information Clearing House" --- - The Congress and administration of the United States of America have just enacted a law, the Military Commissions Act of 2006, which justifies and promotes the practice of torture through the authorization of coercive interrogations and the infliction of mental and physical pain as an allegedly legal process. This measure has been taken in the name of a Global War on Terror whose purposefully undefined legal status permits, as part of its strategies and tactics, the inclusion not only of true criminals, but also of groups or persons that challenge military occupations or tyrannical governments which, according to international law, should guarantee them combatant status along with organizations and movements of civil defense or resistance and ordinary citizens. This legalization of torture is the culmination of a series of global scandals that have made evident its use by the agents and militaries of that same Global War on those whom they dispose of at their discretion, principally in secret prisons and military detention camps.

Torture is an instrument of violence whose purpose is to destroy the moral and physical integrity of human beings, and to nullify their will. The scientific methods of coercive interrogation, as much as the electrical, chemical, physical and psychical techniques of aggression, define one and the same system of violation, degradation and subjection of a person. Only despotic, corrupt and militaristic governments have made use of these dehumanizing practices. Only totalitarian systems have deemed them legitimate. Democratic communities, the moral and religious conscience of the people, and the most elemental humanism have not stopped opposing their atrocity and cruelty.

The implementation of torture deliberately encompasses a wide range of social groups, including the families, the social circles, or the religious communities that are able to provide direct or indirect information about any form of political resistance, be it violent or not. Thus, torture is not only a cruel practice, but rather it institutes an entire system of terror and social coercion. The ultimate objective is to humiliate and dehumanize the communities to which it is applied, to destroy their bonds of solidarity, to empty their confidence in themselves and to liquidate

their collective will. It is the sinister expression of an unlimited power over the most intimate spaces of the body and over entire nations, in a world in which every day there is more injustice and inequality; and more desperation.

The militarily organized practice of torture, the sexual abuse, and all other abuses of men and women, clandestine incarcerations and forced disappearances, are not new in the history of the Third World, and of Latin America in particular. It has been instead an historical constant of colonial, neocolonial and neoliberal domination. The system of torture was promoted in a similarly criminal manner under the Cold War banner of yesterday, just as today it is promoted under the slogan of the War on Terror. However, the justification of torture by the North American authorities has consequences even more grave still. Many governments have been served by torture, but they could not legitimize it, nor did they attempt to defend and disseminate liberty with methods of this kind. The current propaganda that promotes torture in the name of the so-called War on Terror offers these governments a sinister alibi for their use of torture past, present and future. Whether legalized or not, torture is an aberrant practice condemned by fundamental principles of humanity.

The crimes against humanity committed during World War II made necessary a profound reformulation of the doctrine of human rights. In the recent past, we have been witness to the reduction, the instrumentalization and the neutralization of these same rights, to the extreme that they are made unrecognizable. The rights to conserve the cultural patrimonies of the Third World, the earth, uncontaminated air and water, and the people's right to autonomy, have all been the object of degenerative renegotiations and redefinitions. A person's right to physical and moral integrity, to the legal defense of his or her innocence in the face of corporate and state powers, and the right to resist constant territorial violations, violations of the ecosystem and of the individual human life, have been encroached upon time and time again. The propaganda of war and the legitimization of torture crown this regressive process of a threatened humanity.

We appeal to the sacred respect for human dignity, for its physical and spiritual integrity, and for its moral sovereignty. We demand the rejection of torture as an inhuman practice that is contrary to every civilized form of coexistence and is opposed to the true restoration of a damaged peaceable community of the people: in the name of Human Rights.

Monterrey, Mexico, 26 October 2006.

Pilar Calveiro (Political scientist, Mexico, D.F.)

Carlos Castresana (Attorney, Madrid)

Rita Laura Segato (Anthropologist, Brasilia)

Margarita Serje (Anthropologist, Bogotá)

Eduardo Subirats (Writer, Princeton)

This manifesto is being supported by the following intellectuals:

Gabriel García Márquez (Nobel Prize in Literature 1982, Aracataca)

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Nobel Peace Prize 1980, Buenos Aires)

José Saramago (Nobel Prize in Literature 1998, Lisboa)

Juan Goytisolo (Writer, Marrakech)

Javier Acevedo (Lawyer, Honduras)

Mariclaire Acosta Urquidi, (Promoter of Human Rights, Mexico)

Xavier Albo (Researcher, Bolivia)

Rafael Barrios M. (Member of the Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear, Colombia)

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Benjamin Cuellar (Director of the Instituto de Derechos Humanos de la Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, El Salvador).

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Luis Villoro (Philosopher, Mexico)

Jose Woldenberg (Political scientist, Mexico).

Translated by Danielle Carlo