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North Carolina religious leaders call for declassification of torture report

Megan Fincher | Sep. 27, 2013

More than 190 religious leaders from North Carolina, including the Catholic bishop of Raleigh, are asking one of their U.S. senators to endorse the declassification of a report on the CIA's use of torture.

The North Carolina Council of Churches (NCCC) has written a letter [1] to Republican Sen. Richard Burr, asking him to support the release of a 6,000-page report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, of which he is a member, on detention and torture tactics used by the CIA since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The Aug. 27 letter, release to the press last week, was signed by Catholic Bishop Michael Burbidge of Raleigh as well as hundreds of other clergy members, including Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders.

The report, which took three years to compile, is classified, but some senators told *The New York Times* [2] it "concludes that the use of waterboarding, wall-slamming, shackling in painful positions, forced nudity and sleep deprivation produced little information of value. It concludes that the use of those techniques did not disrupt any terrorist plots and made no significant contribution to finding Osama bin Laden."

Intelligence Committee Democrats, led by chairwoman Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, want to declassify the report's 300-page executive summary. Only one Republican, Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine, agrees with them. The remaining Republicans, led by committee vice chairman Sen. Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, do not want anything to go public unless their dissenting statement and a summary of the CIA's response is included, the *Times* reported.

Republican committee members support the CIA's anti-terrorism efforts, and the NCCC tried to appeal to this position. Writing to Burr, who is also the ranking Republican on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, NCCC said, "Our relations with the Muslim world have deteriorated, and a major reason is that our credibility on human rights is under question ... Our national security would be improved" if the Intelligence Committee report were to be declassified.

"As a strong supporter of the U.S. armed forces and its veterans, you can do nothing more valuable in restoring the world's respect for our service members ... than to help make public the [committee's] report on detainee treatment," NCCC wrote.

The NCCC letter also explained that people of faith want to reconcile with torture "done by our citizens and in our country's name." They cite an April statement [3] from Des Moines, Iowa, Bishop Richard Pates, chairman of U.S. bishops' committee on international peace and justice, in which Pates also urged Feinstein and Chambliss to declassify the Senate report.

"The U.S. bishops have long registered their absolute opposition to torture," Pates wrote. "In Catholic teaching, torture is an intrinsic evil that cannot be justified under any circumstances. Torture violates the human dignity of each person. It is degrading to all involved, not only the victim. It also compromises the perpetrator and the

society that tolerates its practice. It has a corrosive effect and diminishes our moral credibility in the world.

"Having the [committee] release the full report on CIA interrogation techniques would go a long way to ensuring that the public becomes aware of past practices, and of the illegality and ineffectiveness of torture."

Similarly, NCCC wrote, "Sen. John McCain has spoken out repeatedly about the need for the U.S. to come to terms with the truth about detainee abuse. In so doing, the U.S. will display moral integrity to the world and show the respect due to all human life."

The issue of torture is especially significant to North Carolinians after a report titled *The North Carolina Connection To Extraordinary Rendition and Torture* [4] was published in 2012.

The report shows that Aero Contractors Ltd., whose headquarters are at the Johnston County Airport in Smithfield, N.C., worked for the CIA from at least 2001 to 2006.

"Aero aided in the kidnapping, extraordinary rendition, secret detention, and torture of a number of men," the report states.

[Megan Fincher is a Bertelsen intern for *NCR*. She can be reached at mfincher@ncronline.org]

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