



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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June 16, 2006

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

As Chairman of the Committee on International Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I urge you to make sure that the Defense Department upholds the highest ethical standards and U.S. commitments to observe international law in its treatment of detainees whether here in the United States or abroad.

Last year the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops encouraged Congress to adopt provisions in the FY 2006 Defense Appropriations Act prescribing uniform standards for the interrogation of persons under detention of the Department of Defense and prohibiting cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of persons under custody or control of the United States government. We welcomed President Bush's endorsement of those provisions. When Congress adopted them with his support, the United States began to turn the corner on the profound moral question of how we should treat detainees. This issue also has a major impact on the way the United States is viewed abroad.

The Committee on International Policy is writing now to express its concern over press reports regarding a directive on the treatment of detainees under consideration by your Department. These press accounts, if they are accurate, seem to suggest that the new directive might not incorporate the standards of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. As you know, the United States has long supported Common Article 3, which prohibits "cruel treatment and torture" as well as "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment..." Our own troops and citizens benefit from the protections of this standard. We strongly urge you to ensure sure that these important protections are in the new directive on the treatment of detainees.

As events continue to unfold in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, we recognize that combating terrorism remains a top priority for Congress and the Administration. We also recognize, however, that any report of prisoner mistreatment by members of the armed forces of the United States or its allies could seriously undermine US efforts to defeat terrorism. More importantly, such violations also compromise human dignity. A respect for the dignity of every person, ally or enemy, must serve as the foundation of the pursuit of security, justice and peace. There can be no compromise on the moral imperative to protect the basic human rights of any individual incarcerated for any reason.

The United States has a long history of leadership and strong support for human rights around the world. U.S. ratifications of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the

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Convention Against Torture and long-standing adherence to the Geneva Conventions embody our nation's commitment to establishing standards of conduct prohibiting torture and other acts of inhumane treatment of persons in U.S. custody or prisoners rendered by the U.S. to its allies. Tragically, reported abuses of enemy combatants held in military prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay mar our nation's moral record and public image abroad. The lack of clarity regarding the procedures governing treatment of prisoners makes it necessary to adopt more specific and stringent guidelines.

We share the concern of lawmakers and citizens for the safety of U.S. soldiers and civilians serving abroad in these times of great uncertainty and danger. In the face of this perilous climate, our nation must not embrace a morality based on an attitude that "desperate times call for desperate measures" or "the end justifies the means." The inherent justice of our cause and the perceived necessities involved in confronting terrorism must not lead to a weakening or disregard of U.S. international law.

In a time of terrorism and great fear, our individual and collective obligations to respect dignity and human rights, even of our worst enemies, gains added importance. Reaffirming the standards contained in Common Article 3 of the Geneva Accords would reflect the conviction that our nation must treat its prisoners as we would expect our enemies to treat our own military personnel. We urge you to include an explicit adoption of Common Article 3 in the new directive. Doing so would continue your efforts to restore the moral credibility of the United States at a crucial time.

Thank you for your consideration of our views on the just treatment of prisoners and detainees.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Wenski". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy

cc: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley