



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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Dear Senator:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I urge you to support the McCain-Warner amendments numbers 1556 and 1557 to S. 1042, the FY 2006 Defense Authorization Act. The first amendment, number 1556, would prohibit cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of persons under custody or control of the United States government. The second amendment, number 1557, would provide uniform standards for the interrogation of persons under detention of the Department of Defense.

As events unfold in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places, we recognize that combating terrorism remains a top priority for Congress and the Administration. We also recognize, however, that the reported instances of prisoner abuse by members of the U.S. armed services could seriously undermine that effort and compromise human dignity. We believe that 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. Ratifications of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture embody our nation's commitment to establishing standards of conduct and prohibiting torture and other acts of inhumane treatment of persons in U.S. custody. Tragically, our nation's record has been marred by reported instances of abusive treatment of enemy combatants held in military prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The lack of clarity regarding the procedures governing the treatment of prisoners makes it necessary to adopt more specific and stringent guidelines. The McCain-Warner amendments to the Defense Authorization Act would confirm our nation's resolve to ensure that these serious abuses cease and never recur.

We share the concerns of lawmakers and citizens for the safety of U.S. soldiers and civilians 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. and international law.

In a time of terrorism and great fear, our individual and collective obligations to respect basic human dignity and human rights, even of our worst enemies, gains added importance. The guidelines and mechanisms contained in these amendments reflect a conviction that our nation must treat our prisoners as we would expect our enemies to treat our own military personnel. Congress' adoption of these amendments would represent a significant step in restoring 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,

Most Reverend John H. Ricard, S.S.J.
Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee
Chairman, Committee on International Policy