

## Involvement in torture is not limited to US and apartheid-era South African doctors

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, December 22, 2007

[The Lancet](#) 22 December 2007

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

*Text of Letter by Drs C J Burns-Cox, David Halpin, C Stephen Frost, Peter Hall, Doctors for Human Rights, Abbots Langley, UK (PH) addressed to The Lancet, [www.thelancet.com](http://www.thelancet.com) Vol 370 December 15, 2007*

*"If...the machine of government... is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law." Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)*

Involvement in torture is not limited to US and apartheid-era South African doctors.<sup>1</sup> Currently Canadian doctors face allegations of torture in Afghanistan, and, according to Amnesty International, and Physicians for Human Rights Israel, and others, assisting in torture is a regular part of the job of many Israeli doctors.<sup>2</sup> There are also unconfirmed reports of UK military doctors assisting in torture and deliberately giving incorrect causes of death on certificates.<sup>3,4</sup>

The UN convention against torture (2005), ratified by the UK government, obliges governments to investigate and prosecute where there is suspicion of assisting in or turning a blind eye to torture. If it will not follow up and prosecute, it is bound to extradite to a country that will.

When there is an authoritarian government, illegal or legal war, or occupation, doctors are at great risk of going along with evil practices. The brave ones who refuse deserve our respect and help, for their paths will be lonely. We remember what injustice was meted out to the British air force medical officer Malcolm Kendall-Smith, who faced criminal charges for challenging the legality of the war against Iraq. Justice was, however, done to a serving German army officer who was cleared by the supreme court in Germany when he obeyed his conscience and refused to obey orders pertaining to the Iraq war.<sup>5</sup>

We request to have assurance from the UK military, backed up with documentation, that the doctors they employ are given clear instruction on what to do about torture -eg, the definition of torture, when and to whom to report instances of torture, and action to be taken against those guilty. To fail to give clear guidance is a failure of duty to peculiarly vulnerable employees.

Yours faithfully

Drs C J Burns-Cox, David Halpin, C Stephen Frost, Peter Hall

Doctors for Human Rights, Abbots Langley, UK (PH)

## Notes

1 Nicholl DJ, Jenkins T, Miles SH, Hopkins W, Siddiqui A, Boulton F, on behalf of 260 other signatories. Biko to Guantanamo: 30 years of medical involvement in torture. *Lancet* 2007; 370: 823.

2 Amnesty International. Under constant medical supervision: torture, ill-treatment and the health professions in Israel and the Occupied Territories. London, UK: Amnesty International, 1996. [http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/EN\\_GMDE150371996?open&of=ENG-ISR](http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/EN_GMDE150371996?open&of=ENG-ISR) (accessed Oct 23, 2007).

3 Bamber H, Gordon E, Heilbronn R, Forrest D. Attitudes to torture. *J R Soc Med* 2002; 95: 271-72.

4 Gross ML. Doctors in the decent society: torture, ill-treatment and civic duty. *Bioethics* 2004; 18: 181-203.

5 Ruling of the 2nd Wehrdienstsenat of the Bundesverwaltungsgericht (BVerwG) of June 21, 2005. BVerwG 2 WD 12.04.

The original source of this article is [The Lancet](#)  
Copyright © [Global Research](#), [The Lancet](#), 2007

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Global Research](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)