

Senate Report Confirms Ethical Breaches of Health Professionals in CIA Torture Program

Physicians for Human Rights Calls for Public Reckoning on U.S. Violations of the Convention Against Torture

By [Physicians for Human Rights](#)

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#),
[Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

The [leaked summary](#) of the findings from the Senate Select Intelligence Committee's report confirm previous reporting by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR): The CIA enlisted health professionals to use their skills to destroy the minds of prisoners, breaking with longstanding ethical and legal obligations of health professionals. The collaboration of high-level government officials, CIA leadership, and select health professionals enabled a culture of torture, which undermined the United States' moral authority, destroyed public trust in medical ethics, helped recruit people who would use terrorism, and yielded little of value in protecting the nation.

"At a time in U.S. history when legitimate security needs demanded the highest levels of professional expertise and competence, the CIA instead rejected or ignored internal critiques of a patently unlawful, flawed interrogation program," said PHR expert on torture, [Dr. Scott Allen](#), professor of medicine and associate dean of academic affairs at the University of California, Riverside. "They placed a critical intelligence program in the hands of poorly qualified contract health professionals who were willing to violate professional ethics, scientific integrity, and the law." In order to secure legal clearance for these individuals, the CIA misrepresented the known science documenting the harmful effects of the techniques and went to great lengths to obfuscate a program that would not and could not withstand legal, ethical, or scientific scrutiny.

"It is time for Congress, the White House, and intelligence agencies to declassify the entire record of the country's clandestine and military culture of torture," stated PHR advisor on psychological ethics, [Steven Reisner](#), who is also president of Psychologists for Social Responsibility. "In particular, the U.S. government's use of health professionals to develop and employ programs that violated medical ethics and the law must be publicly accounted for." To accomplish this, PHR is repeating its call for total transparency on the part of the U.S. government to make clear the extent to which the CIA, military, and government officials violated the UN Convention against Torture. Additionally, PHR is calling on the U.S. government to hold those officials accountable, with the aim of restoring the legal and ethical boundaries that keep the U.S. government's actions consistent with its obligations under human rights law.

PHR calls on the U.S. Senate Select Intelligence and Armed Services Committees to hold public hearings to reveal the extent of the United States' involvement in torture and ill-treatment and to work to reinstate laws aligned with existing international treaties. Donna

McKay, PHR's executive director stated, "We must guarantee that the United States no longer advocates for or practices torture in any form, including in the treatment of those detained by U.S. armed forces or intelligence agencies and those held in confinement."

PHR has written extensively on the involvement of health professionals in the torture of detainees in practices directed by U.S. forces. Reports include: [Break Them Down](#), [Leave No Marks](#), [Broken Laws](#), [Broken Lives](#), [Aiding Torture](#), and [Experiments in Torture](#), among others.

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) is an independent organization that uses medicine and science to stop mass atrocities and severe human rights violations. We are supported by the expertise and passion of health professionals and concerned citizens alike.

Since 1986, PHR has conducted investigations in more than 40 countries around the world, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, the United States, the former Yugoslavia, and Zimbabwe.

- 1986 — Led investigations of torture in Chile gaining freedom for heroic doctors there
- 1988 — First to document the Iraqi use of chemical weapons on Kurds providing evidence for prosecution of war criminals
- 1996 — Exhumed mass graves in the Balkans and Rwanda to provide evidence for International Criminal Tribunals
- 1997 — Shared the Nobel Peace Prize for the International Campaign to Ban Landmines
- 2003 — Warned US Policymakers on health and human rights conditions prior to and during the invasion of Iraq
- 2004 — Documented genocide and sexual violence in Darfur in support of international prosecutions
- 2010 — Investigated the epidemic of violence spread by Burma's military junta
- 2011 — Championed the principle of noninterference with medical services in times of armed conflict and civil unrest during the Arab Spring
- 2012 — Trained doctors, lawyers, police, and judges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Syria on the proper collection of evidence in sexual violence cases
- 2013 — Won first prize in the Tech Challenge for Atrocity Prevention with MediCapt, our mobile app that documents evidence of torture and sexual violence

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