

US Judge: Obama has the right to protect Bush-Cheney administration from prosecution for torture

Americans Spent Valentine's Day Thanking Spain for Prosecuting Bush Lawyers

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On Valentine's Day 2011, yet another U.S. judge agreed with yet another claim that President Obama has the right to protect members of the Bush-Cheney administration from prosecution for torture.

But a coalition of human rights groups spent the day visiting the Spanish Embassy in Washington, D.C., and Spanish consulates around the United States to share some love for a country that is working to prosecute former top Bush officials for torture.

The coalition thanking and encouraging Spain to enforce laws when the United States will not has gathered 8,400 signatures on a letter, a love letter of sorts, to the people of Spain, and has raised \$6,000 so far for purchasing newspaper and street advertisements in Madrid.

The delegations that presented the letter on Monday to Spain's representatives in the United States reported that their visits seemed to be accepted in the spirit of friendship and gratitude in which they were made. Visits to Spanish diplomatic offices were made in Washington, D.C., New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Miami, Dallas, and Phoenix.

Spanish media outlets, and Spanish-language U.S. outlets, are reporting widely on this effort, while the rest of the U.S. media, and even the blogosphere, could hardly be less interested.

At the Embassy of Spain in Washington, D.C., Ray McGovern and Ann Wright led a meeting with a Spanish diplomat, thanking and encouraging Spain to prosecute former Bush officials for torture on behalf of a large coalition. Ron Fisher reports that they gave the embassy personnel Valentine's Day balloons and cookies.

In New York City, a delegation of a dozen New Yorkers gathered outside the Consulate General of Spain. They went upstairs together to the Consulate and delivered the letter, roses and a box of chocolate. They were interviewed by Univision and EFE.

Terry Rockefeller of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows made this additional remark to me on the importance of what Spain is doing:

"I would add that in my communications with Iraqis who are working on the Justice for Fallujah campaign, these developments in Spain have been a

tremendous inspiration to belief that international law can be a force for positive and nonviolent change.”

In Chicago the delegation to the Spanish consulate included two Veterans for Peace, representatives from Psychologists for Social Responsibility, Catholic peace and justice activists, and representatives of Amnesty International and World Can't Wait.

Jay Becker reports:

“The vice consul at the Spanish consulate in Chicago met with us. We presented the 120-page petition with the picture of the billboard in Spanish on the cover and the letter to the Spanish people, signed by all of us.

“Ray Parrish from Vets for Peace read a short letter pointing out that Bradley Manning is being held in conditions amounting to torture (with no charges or conviction), while Wikileaks cables reveal real crimes committed by our government.

“Michael from PsySR conveyed the seriousness of the material CCR has compiled and urged the Spanish judiciary to take the lead the way they had in pursuing Pinochet of Chile. I read from the letter and underscored that President Obama and Eric Holder had acknowledged that torture has been committed by the US government but failed to prosecute and in fact pressured other countries not to pursue charges, which is a crime under international law.

The vice consul accepted the petition and letter, and flowers and chocolates presented by Chris and Mary Fogarty, Irish-American anti-war and justice activists. He assured us that he will convey them all to the Consul General as soon as he returned to the consulate, and we urged him to convey our appeal to the people of Spain. The vice consul said we were brave to take this action, but we replied that we are asking Spain to be brave and uphold international law and justice in the face of pressure from this government.

“We all felt afterward that we had conveyed the seriousness of the action that needs to be taken now, and this was another important step in developing the political movement that can make these long-overdue prosecutions a reality. I hope we'll have photos shortly, and perhaps more impressions from other participants.”

Susan Harman reports from San Francisco:

“Just home from ours in San Francisco. Eleven of us, in the rain. They said they'd heard about the rest of our actions around the country. They weren't allowed to accept the beautiful white roses (peace), and wouldn't let us take pictures of them or inside the lobby, so we made do out in front. Notice (in photo at top of article) Tom, an 80-year-old Korean War vet, and Juanita (with dog), who lives across the street from John Yoo in the Berkeley hills. Felt good to be able to say something nice, for a change!”

Leslie Harris reports from Dallas:

“We visited the Spanish Consulate in Dallas today. We were greeted by Jennifer Zimmer, assistant to the Spanish Consul, Janet Kafka, who welcomed us into

the consulate. Holding a banner that read, “Gracias, Espana,” we explained that we were there to express our heartfelt thanks for Spain’s efforts in upholding the rule of law.

“We took turns reading the letter of thanks, support, and encouragement to the citizens of Spain for their interest in investigating U.S. officials’ roles in authorizing torture. We expressed our sincere hopes that they and their judiciary will dispel the notion that any country is above the law.

“We wished everyone a Happy Valentines Day and presented a bouquet of flowers, some heart-shaped balloons, and a hefty stack of papers – a photocopy of a billboard planned to go up in Spain which read, “Por favor, hagan lo que los EEUU no hara – procesar a los torturadores,” and a petition, signed by over 8,400 people, asking Spain to do what the U.S. won’t: prosecute torture! Ms. Zimmer smiled, thanked us, and agreed to pass on our message.

“Even as we remembered those whose hearts and bodies have been broken by torture and violence, our hearts were warmed at the thought of people around the world working together to uphold justice and restore the rule of law. New friends. Smiles all around. The perfect day for a heartfelt expression of love for humanity.”

Sandy Davies of PDA-Miami and the author of “Blood On Our Hands: the American Invasion and Destruction of Iraq,” reports from Miami:

“We delivered the letter, plus chocolates, roses and a vase of flowers from Chip’s garden (including “Bleeding Hearts”) to Cristina Barrios Almazor, the Spanish Consul General in Miami. I felt that the message was received very much in the spirit in which it was delivered, as a heartfelt thank you from the people of the United States to the people of Spain on an important matter.

“I explained to the Consul General that we represented hundreds of thousands of Americans who belong to the 29 organizations listed as signatories on the letter. I told her that we are embarrassed and ashamed by our country’s failure to prosecute these crimes, and that we are grateful that, of all the countries in the world that could prosecute these crimes under universal jurisdiction, Spain has stood up to actually pursue these cases.

“Our delegation included Jim Goodenow, Diane and Ellie (South Florida Impeachment Coalition), Catherine De Leon (PDA), Chip Sullivan (PDA & VFP), Orlando Collado (President, VFP Chapter 032 – not in picture) and me.

In all the work we do, it’s rare that I feel I’ve been part of something as important as this, that what we did today may make a real difference to the prospects for accountability and justice, and thus to deterring such crimes in the future. Peace!”

Sharon Tipton reports from Los Angeles:

“A representative from the Spanish Consulate wrote to me that this issue was not under their jurisdiction but that they would forward the letters to the Spanish Embassy. This did not stop our expression of love for the Spanish people and their wonderful pursuit of international justice! A number of grateful citizens, including Karen and Sharon from the

Orange County Peace Coalition; Michael Haas, 2009 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, and author of "George W. Bush, War Criminal?", and John, Jennifer, and Adela from World Can't Wait visited the Consulate this morning bearing gifts!

"We told the Consulate representative who greeted us behind a pane of glass why we were there and that we had a gift for the Spanish people! She graciously came out to us and accepted our flowers and letters, but seemed a little uncomfortable being in our video and photos!

"Mike Haas spoke to us afterward and shared a great analysis of the state of U.S. torture accountability (which I have on video). In part he shared that the US won't prosecute torture - but that when one of these cases against a prominent American wins, it will finally get the attention of the American people. So, Spain's judges and people give us Hope! Gracias Gente de Espana!"

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