

Coalition for an Ethical Psychology

human rights – ethics – social justice

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Coalition for an Ethical Psychology Charges APA with Complicity in Bush-Era Torture Interrogations

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As the American Psychological Association (APA) meets this weekend in San Diego, CA, for its annual convention, the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology today released a letter to APA President Carol Goodheart detailing the APA's complicity and failure to act in ethics scandals involving psychologists who aided the U.S. government's torture program. [Letter to Goodheart attached.]

The Coalition charges that the APA has been directly complicit in supporting and empowering psychologists to develop, research, supervise and/or implement the Bush-era interrogation program with impunity. This complicity includes APA involvement in the cases of three psychologists – James Mitchell, John Leso, and Larry James – against whom ethics complaints have recently been filed with state licensing boards. APA complicity goes back to 2002 when the association amended its ethics code in a way that protected psychologists involved in government sponsored torture.

The Coalition is calling for an independent, impartial, outside investigation to study the APA's collusion in the U.S. torture program. The Coalition also calls upon the APA to write letters in support of state ethics complaints against APA members Larry James and John Leso, and to initiate an APA ethics investigation of Larry James. The Coalition further insists that the association fully implement the member-passed referendum withdrawing psychologists from sites in violation of or outside of international law, specifically including specifically Guantánamo and Bagram Air Base.

The Coalition letter details evidence of APA torture complicity:

- Former APA President Joseph Matarazzo was on the board of Mitchell, Jessen & Associates, the firm that reportedly designed and implemented the CIA's torture program.
- APA has failed to adjudicate an internal ethics complaint against member Larry James, president of the Military Psychology Division, and has failed to support state ethics complaints against James and Leso, both of whom are accused of participation in abuses at Guantánamo.
- The APA ethics complaint against Leso, filed in August 2006, is perhaps the longest-unadjudicated complaint in APA history.
- APA hosted confidential conferences together with the CIA and RAND Corporation in 2003 and 2004 at which James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, CIA consultants and torture psychologists, were among the attendees. The 2003 conference discussed such "enhanced interrogation" techniques as use of drugs and sensory overload.

- A former top APA official, Russ Newman, while married to a Guantánamo Behavioral Science Consultant, was allowed to exert major influence on an APA ethics task force implicitly determining whether his wife's activities were ethical.
- That same task force was dominated by military-intelligence psychologists, a majority of whom had served in chains-of-command accused of participating in detainee abuse.
- APA has actively undermined the 59% of voting members who voted to withdraw psychologists from Guantánamo, Bagram, and other detention sites operating outside of or in violation of international law.

Since 2006, the Coalition and its allies have urged changes in APA policy through open letters (often joined by other psychological and human rights organizations), a campaign of withholding dues and mass resignations, an election campaign for APA President, and a member-passed referendum withdrawing psychologists from sites in violation of or outside of international law.

The Coalition for an Ethical Psychology is dedicated to putting psychology on a firm ethical foundation in support of social justice and human rights. The Coalition has been in the lead of efforts to remove psychologists from torture and abusive interrogations.

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