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Torture: Time for a Commission of Inquiry

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I'll never forget the phone call from my brother the day after the photographs of US soldiers torturing prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq became public. "These have to be just a few rogue soldiers who did this," he said. "This could not have been policy. This is not who we are as a nation."

I remember being sick at heart, and answering, "I'm afraid this is policy. After all, what is the School of the Americas? It's a place where we actually taught techniques of torture."

As time has passed, I fear that many people — including people of faith — are discussing torture as if it were just another political or security issue, as if it did not have serious moral ramifications. It's almost as if we are being numbed by the public debate on this subject.

And so, on June 11th, a group of interfaith leaders will go to the White House to urge President Obama to establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the charges of torture at Guantanamo and other prisons that we run around the world. They will present him with a letter that says, in part:

The reality is that our nation is now shackled to a shameful history of torture. As people of faith we know that only the truth can set us free. We must therefore, as a nation, be mature and honest enough to examine fully and disclose completely the wrongdoing that has been committed. Accountability is essential in a nation of laws.

The Catholic representative in that interfaith group is Marie Dennis, representing Pax Christi — USA. Marie is an excellent representative, and I am delighted that a woman is representing Catholics. But I have to wonder: where are the Catholic bishops on this Commission of Inquiry?

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