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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Following Groundbreaking Report by Vanity Fair: PHR Condemns Illegal, Ineffective and Unethical CIA and US Military Torture Practices**

### **Calls on Bush Administration to End Use of Abusive SERE Tactics and Prohibit Psychologists from Involvement in Interrogations**

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["Rorschach and Awe" in Vanity Fair](#)

#### **Related PHR Report**

[Break Them Down: Systematic Use of Psychological Torture by US Forces](#)

*"The indisputable evidence disclosed today that the US government, with the assistance of psychologists, was engaged in psychological torture tactics for the CIA is as morally reprehensible as Tuskegee and the MK-Ultra program of the 1950's and 60's."*  
-Leonard S. Rubenstein, Executive Director of Physicians for Human Rights-

Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) urgently reiterated its call today for the White House and Congress to prohibit the use of all SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape) techniques in interrogations by US agencies, especially those conducted by the CIA at the agency's "Black Sites" and other secret facilities. SERE techniques include water-boarding, the use of stress positions, isolation, exploitation of phobias, and cultural and sexual humiliation, among other tactics. The group's statement follows Vanity Fair's shocking revelations about the alleged involvement of CIA and US military psychologists in torturing detainees in US custody, as well as its disclosure of a standard operating procedure for use of the SERE tactics that appears to have been employed at Guantánamo. PHR has been calling for the Administration to prohibit tactics used in these and other interrogations for nearly three years.

The report in Vanity Fair details the key role in detainee abuse played by psychologists, particularly CIA contractors Drs. James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, from US military SERE schools-training programs designed to instruct service personnel in physical and psychological torture resistance. These psychologists were contracted by the CIA to use these SERE techniques on high value detainees-a practice that is unethical, ineffective and illegal. This

new information about the alleged involvement of psychologists in the development and implementation of psychological torture techniques for the CIA was preceded on May 18th by similar revelations about Department of Defense (DoD) psychologists using these tactics at DoD sites, according to a recently declassified DoD Inspector General's report.

"The indisputable evidence disclosed today that the US government, with the assistance of psychologists, was engaged in psychological torture tactics for the CIA is as morally reprehensible as Tuskegee and the MK-Ultra program of the 1950's and 60's," stated Leonard S. Rubenstein, Executive Director of PHR. "It is imperative that both White House and Congress explicitly prohibit the use of these specific tactics once and for all. They have no place in lawful and honorable military and intelligence communities."

Senator Carl Levin, Chair of Senate Armed Services Committee, has announced publicly that he intends to call hearings on the use of the SERE tactics by the US. PHR called today for immediate Congressional investigative hearings to learn how these methods came to be used and who was responsible for approving them. "Extensive and exhaustive hearings are required to conclusively and fully understand whether the regime of psychological torture documented at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, CIA Black Sites and elsewhere was authorized at the highest levels of the government, as it appears, and if so, to hold those civilian officials accountable for these gross violations of human rights," stated Rubenstein.

Following its statement released last week, PHR again called for the Senate Select Intelligence Committee to reject the pending nomination of John A. Rizzo for CIA General Counsel, who provided legal advice to the agency while these tactics were developed and used. On a related issue, a bill seeking to restore the writ of habeas corpus for those detained at Guantánamo and other detention facilities is being brought to the Senate floor for debate and a vote this week. PHR believes that restoring habeas corpus will help ensure that terror suspects cannot be held indefinitely, as well as be subject to abusive treatment, without being able to challenge their incarceration.

The organization also urged action by the American Psychological Association (APA). "In the face of strong allegations that psychologists and the practice of psychology has been at the epicenter of US abuses against detainees, the APA has a responsibility to condemn such tactics, call for an investigation and prohibit its members from participating in any activities that employ these tactics, which constitute psychological and physical torture," stated Rubenstein. "Additionally, the APA must immediately prohibit their members from participating in national security interrogations. The APA has long asserted that psychologists should act as 'safety officers' in these interrogations. Today's report shows that the real role played by psychologists ran counter to claims of helping make interrogations safe, legal and effective -in fact, these psychologists were inflicting grievous harm."

"The use of psychologists by the military and the intelligence community to inflict psychological harm on detainees in our custody is the most severe affront to health professional ethics imaginable," stated Brigadier General Stephen N. Xenakis, MD (USA-Ret.), former Commander of Southeast Medical Command and a Senior Advisor to PHR. "This scandal has stained the core ethical and legal foundations of two professions-the soldier and the healer. Those uniformed and civilian officials who authorized this perversion of the military medical corps' mission should be ashamed of their actions and be held to account."

Beyond the disclosures about the alleged actions of psychologists at CIA Black Sites in the *Vanity Fair* report, a recent and related Salon.com story contains disturbing new information about high-level authorizations in late 2001 of broad parameters for CIA interrogations involving personnel, including psychologists, seconded from the DoD. These authorizations strongly suggest the involvement of senior-level Bush Administration officials in the events that

led to the regime of psychological torture that migrated to all three theaters of operation in the "War on Terror," including Iraq, Afghanistan, and the CIA Black Sites.

"The long-standing distinctions between the roles of the military and intelligence communities appear to have been ripped asunder in the rush to employ abusive interrogation tactics after the tragedy of 9/11," stated Xenakis. "Harnessing the medical knowledge of health professionals to break bodies and minds is, sadly, but one of many egregious consequences when over two centuries of military tradition and ethical discipline is tossed aside."

Since 2005, PHR has documented the systematic use of psychological torture by the US during its interrogations of suspected terrorists at Guantánamo, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and elsewhere in its groundbreaking report *Break Them Down*. The organization has repeatedly called for an end to the use of the SERE tactics by US personnel, the dismantling of the Behavioral Science Consultation Teams (BSCT) teams, and a full Congressional investigation of the use of psychological torture by the US Government, among other recommendations. Additionally, PHR has worked to mobilize the health professional community, particularly the professional associations, such as the American Medical Association, to adopt strong ethical prohibitions against direct participation in interrogations. Both the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association prohibited their members from directly participating in interrogations last summer.

#### **Related Links**

[PHR Letter to American Psychological Association Regarding Psychologists and Interrogations](#)

[PHR Letter to Secretary Gates Applauds Declassification of Report on Interrogation Techniques and Calls for Remedial Measures](#)

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*Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) mobilizes the health professions to advance the health and dignity of all people by protecting human rights. As a founding member of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, PHR shared the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize.*