

Retired Military Demand That Bush Ban Torture

Twenty-three retired admirals and generals on Jan. 18 sent a letter to President Bush, demanding full and forceful implementation of the McCain Anti-Torture Amendment. Gen. Joseph Hoar, USMC (ret.), former Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Central Command, and Adm. John Hutson, USN (ret.), former Judge Advocate General of the Navy, gave a press conference on Jan. 19 releasing the letter, which we reprint below.

As explained in the press release announcing the press conference, which was sponsored by Human Rights First, the former military officers were impelled to action by the fact that, when the President signed the McCain amendment into law, banning cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of detainees, the White House issued a “signing statement”—an official document in which the President lays out his interpretation of the new law. In the statement, President Bush said he views the limits on abuses prohibited by the McCain amendment in the context of his broader powers as Commander-in-Chief.

Human Rights First then expressed its concern that this statement might mean the President believes he can bypass the absolute ban passed overwhelmingly by both Houses of Congress. The military men’s letter seeks to counter circumvention of the amendment.

Dear President Bush:

We write to thank you for publicly endorsing Senator McCain’s amendment on the treatment of detainees in U.S. custody, and for signing it into law. The new law, implemented and enforced in accordance with Congressional in-

tent, will ensure that the United States has a single standard for interrogating enemy prisoners that is effective, lawful, and humane. The primary reason we strongly supported Senator McCain’s effort is that we believe this law, if effectively and forcefully implemented, will help protect our troops in Iraq and elsewhere, now and in the future.

Past abuses have damaged military discipline, put American military personnel at greater risk, undermined U.S. intelligence-gathering efforts, and greatly harmed America’s image around the world. It is incumbent on you as President and Commander-in-Chief to ensure that all senior members of your administration speak with a consistent voice to make clear that the United States now has a single standard of conduct specified in law that governs all interrogations, regardless of the legal status or the location of the detainee being interrogated. Accountability and deterrence have never been more important to end all torture and abuse in America’s name, and thereby restore America’s reputation in the world. This long overdue corrective action will require strong leadership from you and others in positions of authority.

Mr. President, we welcome your attention to this issue and stand ready to assist in any way we can to ensure the effective implementation of this new law. Clear and unambiguous implementation will help ensure that our brave men and women in uniform will never again feel that to prevail against the enemy they must risk their honor or the values they fight to protect.

Sincerely,

General Joseph Hoar, USMC (ret.)

Lieutenant Gen. Robert G. Gard, Jr., USA (ret.)

Lieutenant Gen. Claudia J. Kennedy, USA (ret.)

Vice Admiral Al Konetzni, USN (ret.)

Lieutenant Gen. Charles Otstott, USA (ret.)

Vice Admiral Jack Shanahan, USN (ret.)

Major General Eugene Fox, USA (ret.)

Major General John L. Fugh, USA (ret.)

Rear Admiral Donald J. Guter, USN (ret.)

Major General Fred E. Haynes, USMC (ret.)

Rear Admiral John D. Hutson, USN (ret.)

Major General Melvyn Montano, ANG (ret.)

Major General Gerald T. Sajer, USA (ret.)

Major General Robert H. Scales, USA (ret.)

Major General Michael J. Scotti, USA (ret.)

Brig. General David M. Brahams, USMC (ret.)

Brig. General James Cullen, USA (ret.)

Brig. General Evelyn P. Foote, USA (ret.)

Brig. General David R. Irvine, USA (ret.)

Brig. General Richard O-Meara, USA (ret.)

Brig. General John K. Schmitt, USA (ret.)

Brig. General Stephen N. Xenakis, USA (ret.)

Biographies of the signers can be found at www.humanrightsfirst.org.