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## **This is being done in our name? Unacceptable.**

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Knight Ridder Newspapers  
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It is both peculiar and chilling to find oneself discussing the problem of American torture.

I have considered support of basic human rights and dignity so much a part of our national identity that this feels as strange as though I'd suddenly become Chinese or found Fidel Castro in the refrigerator.

One's first response to the report by the International Red Cross about torture at our prison at Guantanamo is denial. But our country has opposed torture since its founding. One of our founding principles is that cruel and unusual punishment is both illegal and wrong. Every year, our State Department issues a report grading other countries on their support for or violations of human rights.

The first requirement here is that we look at what we are doing -- and not blink, not use euphemisms.

Despite the Red Cross' polite language, this is not "tantamount to torture." It's torture. It is not "detainee abuse." It's torture. If they were doing it to you, you would know it was torture. It must be hidden away, because it's happening in Cuba or elsewhere abroad.

Yes, it's true, we did sort of know this already. It was clear when the Abu Ghraib scandal broke in Iraq that the infection had come from Guantanamo. The infamous memos by Alberto Gonzales, our next attorney general, and by John Ashcroft's "Justice" Department pretty well laid it out.

In a way, Abu Ghraib, as bizarrely sadistic as it was, is easier to understand than this cold, relentless and apparently endless procedure at Gitmo.

At least Abu Ghraib took place in the context of war. At Guantanamo, there is no threat to anyone -- Americans are not being killed or hurt there.

"The construction of such a system, whose stated purpose is the production of intelligence, cannot be considered other than an intentional system of cruel, unusual and degrading treatment, and a form of torture," the Red Cross report says.

Our country, the one you and I are responsible for, has imprisoned these "illegal combatants" for three years now. What else do we expect to get out of them?

We don't even release their names or say what they're charged with -- whether they're Taliban, al Qaeda or just some farmers who happened to get in the way (in Afghanistan, farmers and soldiers are apt to be the same).

If this hasn't been established in three years, when will it be? How long are they to be subjected to "humiliating acts, solitary confinement, temperature extremes, use of forced positions"?

In the name of Jesus Christ Almighty, why are people who are representing our government, paid by us, writing filth on the Qurans of helpless prisoners? Is this American? Is it Christian? What are our moral values? Where is the clergy on this? Speak out, speak up.

The creepiest aspect of the Red Cross report is the involvement of doctors and psychiatrists in something called "Biscuit" teams. Get used to that term; it's short for behavioral science consultation team and will end up in the same category of national shame as Wounded Knee. According to The New York Times, Biscuit teams are "composed of psychologists and psychological workers who advise the interrogators."

Shades of Dr. Mengele.

An earlier Red Cross report questioned whether "psychological torture" was taking place. I guess that's what you call sleep deprivation and prolonged exposure to extremely loud noises while shackled to a chair.

The beatings reported would not be psychological torture. I pass over the apparently abandoned practice of sexual taunting. The Red Cross also reports a far greater incidence of mental illness caused by stress.

If you have neither the imagination nor the empathy to envision yourself in such circumstances, please consider why the senior commanders in the military are so horrified by this.

It's very simple: If we do this, if we break international law and the conventions of warfare, then the same thing can be done to American soldiers who are captured abroad.

Any country can use exactly the same lame rationale about "enemy combatants" to torture American troops in any kind of conflict. Then we would protest to the Red Cross, of course.

I suppose one could argue that we're fighting people who chop off the heads of their prisoners, so there. Since when have we taken up Abu al-Zarqawi as a role model?

In the famous hypothetical example, you might consider torture justified if you had a terrorist who knew where a bomb was planted that was about to go off. But three years later?

Some people have got to be held accountable for this, and that would include Congress.

My question is: What are you going to do about this?

It's your country, your money, your government. You own it; you run it; you are the board of directors. They are doing this in your name. The people we elect to public office do what you want them to do. Perhaps you should get in touch with them.