

August 14, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington DC, 20500

Dear President Obama:

We are deeply troubled by Senator Feinstein's description and the descriptions of other Senators of the redactions your Administration has proposed to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) oversight report on the CIA's detention and interrogation program. We write to urge you to reconsider them. Intelligence Committee members have called the report's redacted executive summary "incomprehensible" and "impossible to understand." According to Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Chairman Carl Levin, the redactions include information that was publicly disclosed years ago in a SASC oversight report on detainee abuse and are "totally unacceptable."

In March, you said that it is important that the SSCI Torture Report findings be made public "so that the American people can understand what happened in the past, and that can help guide us as we move forward." More recently, you said that what happened in the CIA torture program "needs to be understood and accepted. And we have to, as a country, take responsibility for that so that, hopefully, we don't do it again in the future." But that cannot happen if the redactions to the SSCI Torture Report executive summary conceal the truth and render the account impossible to understand. Redactions must be strictly limited to those required to protect current, legitimate intelligence sources and methods. In this case, the clear impression is that they have been used strategically to obscure the truth. Unfortunately, that impression is consistent with the CIA's demonstrated resistance to congressional oversight and the significant role the agency reportedly played in the declassification process. Indeed, Director Brennan recently admitted, contrary to his prior assertions, that agency personnel wrongly accessed SSCI computers and sought a criminal investigation into committee staff conduct without a factual basis for doing so.

A vital safeguard against a return to torture is a fully informed public that will not allow it. The Committee's report stands to play a critical role in building a durable national consensus against torture, but not if it is redacted beyond comprehension.

You have been outspoken about the importance of transparency in government and in 2009, over the CIA's objections, you declassified the Office of Legal Counsel Torture Memos with minimal redactions. That was the right decision and it had a powerful impact on the public's understanding about how torture was used and justified in the past. We urge you to act consistent with that decision now and to demonstrate the same leadership in relation to the Senate's important oversight report.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

Appeal for Justice

Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law

Center for National Security Studies

Center for Victims of Torture

The Constitution Project

Constitutional Alliance

Defending Dissent Foundation

Demand Progress

The Open Government Project at the Electronic Privacy Information Center

Human Rights First

Human Rights Watch

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

National Security Counselors

National Security Network

Open Society Policy Center

Physicians for Human Rights

Win Without War