

Letter to the Editor:

As we approach the 10th anniversary of the tragedies of Sept. 11, our nation has a chance to reflect on the past decade, both where we have come and where we are headed. Though we continue to grieve for the victims and their families, we must not ignore one of the devastating consequences of rooting out al-Qaida and other terrorist groups: the U.S. government's use of torture on its detainees.

The Clerics of Saint Viator (Viatorians) join with 300 other religious organizations that make up the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, as together, we work to create a permanent end to the use of torture. As such, we are calling for a bi-partisan Commission of Inquiry to investigate our government's use of torture --- to ensure that U.S. sponsored torture never happens again.

Morally and ethically, torture is an abomination that runs contrary to the teachings that the Viatorians and all faith communities hold dear. It is degrading to everyone involved --- policy makers, perpetrators and victims --- and it fails to honor the God-given dignity of all persons.

Though President Obama banned torture upon taking office, the practice lies in great danger of becoming widely accepted.

In 2009, two days after being sworn in, President Obama issued an executive order halting torture and calling for the closure of the detention center at Guantanamo Bay. But today, more than two years later, this facility is still open and our government refuses to confront its history and fully investigate its use of torture.

On June 30, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder announced an end to Assistant U.S. Attorney John Durham's two-year preliminary investigation into the CIA's use of torture on detainees, concluding that further investigation was not warranted and that the deaths of a mere two detainees would be further investigated.

Having the administration's only investigation into the use of torture end with such a minimalist outcome further demonstrates the need for a Commission of Inquiry to provide a complete accounting of our nation's use of torture --- free from political bias and the limits of a criminal investigation.

It is undeniable that our country has engaged in torture as an interrogation technique. We must fully investigate who was tortured, why they were tortured, what techniques were used on them, who was responsible and authorized the torture, and finally, what steps need to be taken to ensure that we as a nation never torture again.

The use of torture is damaging to our society on multiple levels, and is in clear violation of the UN Convention Against Torture, which absolutely prohibits any form of torture at the hands of state agents.

Little is gained by the use of torture, but much is lost. Each revelation of torture or "enhanced interrogation" gravely harms our nation's international standing and undermines its legitimacy and ability to have a positive influence in international affairs. We cannot expect other nations to listen and heed our views of human rights and civil liberties, if we so casually abandon our own principles.

Most of all, as people of faith, we know that torture is always and unequivocally wrong. God created all people with dignity and worth, and we grieve knowing that inflicting injustice and cruelty on another human being scars and diminishes all of us.

On this 10th anniversary of 9/11, we have a choice. Do we give into fear and compromise our values in an ineffectual pursuit of a false sense of safety? Or do we strike back at those who would attack us, by proving that our national values and ideals remain strong, that we cannot be intimidated into betraying our beliefs?

We, along with other men and women of faith, firmly choose the latter. We firmly believe that all forms of torture are morally wrong, and we support a thorough investigation into the use of torture by the United States and a permanent elimination of its use in the future.

If we simply ignore what has taken place, what message will this send to our youth? As Viatorians who are committed to educating young people, we cannot stand idly by.