

May 3, 2018

Dear Senators:

As health professionals, bioethicists, and public health experts opposed to torture and ill-treatment, we write to express our grave concern over the nomination of Gina Haspel as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Haspel's reported role in the CIA's post-9/11 rendition, detention, and interrogation program raises grave concerns about her qualifications to lead the agency. She has been implicated in supervising the first "black site" in Thailand, where agency personnel tortured detainees using waterboarding and other long-outlawed techniques. We urge you to undertake a close examination of Haspel's involvement in the rendition, detention, and interrogation program and to reject her nomination if there is evidence that she played any role in carrying out, supervising, or directing the torture or abuse of people in U.S. custody.

Credible evidence also indicates that Haspel was instrumental in the destruction of videotapes and other evidence of criminal conduct. Given this background, it should be clear that Haspel lacks the judgment and character necessary to oversee the development of intelligence in compliance with U.S. laws and treaty obligations.

As health experts who understand the profound mental, physical, and societal effects of torture, we oppose the selection of a nominee who helped conceal the use of torture and held a leadership position at a "black site" where it occurred. She was in a position to know about and influence aspects of a program that purposefully inflicted severe suffering and harm on individuals, to whom the United States has yet to provide rehabilitation or redress as required under the UN Convention Against Torture, a treaty ratified by the United States. Moreover, the program enlisted health professionals to inflict this harm, a grave breach of medical ethics. In Thailand, Haspel worked with contract psychologists James Mitchell and Bruce Jessen, who developed the experimental torture methods used on Abu Zubaydah, Abd al-Rahim al-Nashiri, and many others.

The CIA's use of torture is detailed in the [Executive Summary](#) of the Senate Intelligence Committee's report, including "authorized" techniques such as waterboarding, sleep deprivation, stress positions, and extreme isolation as well as "unauthorized" abuses such as mock executions and rectal feeding. As Physicians for Human Rights has documented, the program used the presence of health professionals to legitimize and sanction torture, extending to the policy authorization of these practices, despite their absolute prohibition under U.S. and international law. Such complicity in torture is a fundamental perversion of medical ethics and has long-term consequences for the integrity and professionalism of all institutions involved.

Haspel's senior role in the now-discontinued CIA torture program should be investigated and disclosed. Promoting her to the CIA's highest position would send a dangerous message contrary to the nation's laws and values. It would also represent a betrayal to victims of torture everywhere, as well as to the American public, which expect U.S. personnel to adhere to the highest legal and ethical standards.

It is essential that all records of Haspel's involvement in this secret program be disclosed and declassified prior to her confirmation hearing on May 9 to ensure proper vetting by the Senate. Senators must be afforded the ability to fully scrutinize the degree to which Haspel's conduct while overseeing the black site prison in Thailand complied with or failed to comply with U.S. human rights obligations, including the absolute prohibition against torture.

We urge you to make clear that torture and other ill-treatment by U.S. officials will not be tolerated with the promotion of those responsible for this dark chapter in American history. Placing Haspel in charge of the CIA would undo efforts – including those of Congress – to repudiate torture and to persuade the world that the United States does not condone its use. We urge you to oppose this nomination and to demand the selection of a nominee with a record of rejecting torture. Such a record is critical to demonstrating a nominee's recognition of the extensive damage torture causes to U.S. national security interests, U.S. moral leadership, and the health and human dignity of victims.

Sincerely,

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