



# June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide

*A Special Resource for Faith Communities and Interfaith Groups*

June 26th is the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, commemorating the day on which the *U.N. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* came into force in 1987. June 26 is a day to remember the suffering and courage of torture victims and survivors worldwide, and is an opportunity for faith communities and religious organizations to join together to express concern about the use of torture in the world and solidarity with torture survivors everywhere.

A comprehensive AIUSA June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide is available at [www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture](http://www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture). The organizing guide includes event ideas, fact sheets, a mini media guide, sample petitions and other resources.

AIUSA's Interfaith Network created this supplementary Interfaith Resource Guide to compliment the general June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide mentioned above. The Interfaith Resource Guide offers further ideas and organizing tips geared more specifically for faith communities and religious groups looking to take action against torture on June 26<sup>th</sup> and beyond. Included in this packet are:

- Action ideas for faith communities and interfaith groups
- Organizing interfaith events: A few things to remember
- Building human rights action within your faith community: Creating a supportive space for discussion
- Non-AI Resources for prayer and reflection
- For reference: Interfaith Resolution of the Anti-Torture Coalition Calling for Independent Bi-Partisan Commission on Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment (April 2005)
- Petitions to share with family, friends, and members of your faith community
- Further action ideas to protect and promote human rights in today's world.

Although the June 26th activities were the impetus for developing this Interfaith Resource Guide, we hope you will find it useful year round. Please feel encouraged to organize events and action opportunities whenever it is most suitable for your community to do so.

For further resources or more information about AIUSA's Interfaith Network, please visit [www.amnestyusa.org/interfaith](http://www.amnestyusa.org/interfaith) or contact [networks@aiusa.org](mailto:networks@aiusa.org).

"This is a day on which we pay our respects to those who have endured the unimaginable. This is an occasion for the world to speak up against the unspeakable. It is long overdue that a day be dedicated to remembering and supporting the many victims and survivors of torture around the world."

*- Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in honor of the first annual  
United Nations Day in Support of Victims of Torture, June 26, 1998*

## Take action June 26<sup>th</sup> with members of your faith community

AIUSA's *Denounce Torture: End It Now!* June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide offers substantive ideas for organizing events and educating your community. Please refer to the June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide for action ideas and resources, available online at [www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture](http://www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture), or by contacting Eric Sears ([esears@aiusa.org](mailto:esears@aiusa.org); 202.544.0200, ext. 243). **Below are a few action suggestions expanded to offer further ideas for people interested in organizing events with their faith communities or religious groups. When organizing your event, please be sure to register and list it on the AIUSA website: [www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/event\\_form.html](http://www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/event_form.html).**

1. **Collect petition signatures and disseminate information through tabling** (refer to June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide and petition included at the end of this packet). Setting up a table outside an organized event or service to reach out to members of your faith community is a great way to share information and engage people in action. If possible, request that your faith leaders announce your presence and endorse your action during the event or service. Attached in this packet are personal petitions to be filled out and sent to AIUSA's Denounce Torture campaign at the address indicated. Personal messages may be written on the reverse of the half page petitions.
2. **Submit an informational article or bulletin insert** to your faith community's or religious organization's publication (refer to June 26 Organizing Guide's section on letters to the editor and opinion articles). Consider including with your submission a copy of the attached half-page petition to be completed by members and sent to the address provided.
3. **Hold a letter-writing circle** with other members of your faith community or religious organization. Contact AIUSA's Urgent Action office ([uan@aiusa.org](mailto:uan@aiusa.org); 303.258.1170) to receive a letter writing guide and an Urgent Action case sheet on a person or group of persons who are in danger of torture. You may want to announce letter-writing circle in your community's bulletin or when members of your community are gathered together, or incorporate a prayer for the person(s) facing torture during a prayer service. At the circle, introduce the action, discuss how taking action can help stop torture or bring justice to the individual(s) for whom you are writing letters, provide pens, paper and stamps, and start writing! Human rights letter-writing actions and guides are available in simple language for children as well, if young ones will be present at the circle.
4. **Organize a sermon or vigil** to express solidarity with torture survivors (refer to the June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide for more information; a list of resources for prayer and reflection is included below). Incorporate prayers and reflection on human dignity and human rights, and invite speakers who offer a unique perspective. Speakers to consider include torture survivors, community members working with survivors of torture, faith leaders, and members of your faith community. Consider building partnerships with other faith groups in your area to collaborate on a common event, share prayers and worship resources, or organize a discussion group (see tips for organizing an interfaith event below).
5. **Plant a tree or 'stop torture' pole** in honor survivors of torture everywhere. Invite religious leaders from your community to make brief statements about the importance of joining together with survivors of torture to seek justice and support healing. Offer participants the opportunity to write a prayer on a piece of paper to be placed in a hole in the ground. On top of the prayers, plant a small tree or 'end torture' pole. The 'end torture pole' could be modeled after a peace pole, with colorful paint or ribbons with prayers or statements such as "*Denounce Torture: Stop It Now!*" or "*June 26, 2005: Standing Together in Solidarity with Survivors of Torture.*"
6. **Support local organizations that work with survivors of torture.** Please see attached resource list for links to directories of local and national torture survivor organizations and treatment centers. Consider how your faith community can support their work.

## Organizing an interfaith event: A few things to remember

1. **Do your research!** Has your faith community participated in previous interfaith events or activities? Have other faith communities or groups in your area organized interfaith coalitions to work on issues of human rights? Develop a list of groups your community has worked with in the past and organizations in your community already involved in anti-torture work.
2. **Build contact lists and plan in partnership.** By building relationships in early planning stages and recruiting a diverse advisory committee, you can be sure that others have a meaningful stake in the event. Offer opportunities to share leadership, ideas and resources, and be sensitive and inclusive to various points of view. Hold a meeting with this advisory committee to assign tasks and coordinate site selection, administration and funding, worship planning, music, media outreach, and activities to raise awareness and generate excitement around the event.
3. **Schedule your event at a time and place that is inclusive.** Talk with partners and seek advice from people who have done similar events to be sure not to schedule an event that may hinder any group's ability to participate. When choosing a day and time for your event, try to avoid Friday and Saturday afternoons, and Sunday mornings. If holding the event at a religious place of worship, be sure to involve the religious leaders, and before hanging banners or signs, consider the perspectives of invited participants so that all will feel comfortable and welcome.
4. **Be as representative as possible.** Invite leaders and members from as many faith traditions as possible present to share readings or prayers specific to their traditions, while also being balanced in terms of gender, race and cultural background. If you plan to have printed programs available, be sure that the input and perspective of various faith traditions is represented.
5. **Prepare logistics and a timetable in advance.** Request that speakers and leadership gather 30-60 minutes before the event for logistical information and a run-through of the service or event. Have hard copies of the agenda available, be clear about time boundaries, and make an effort to stay on schedule!
6. **Provide an opportunity for people to take action.** Plan to have action opportunities available at the service or event. Have petitions available to sign, or create your own group letter, or set aside time for individual letter-writing action on behalf of a person or group of persons at risk of torture (contact AIUSA's Urgent Action office for letter writing actions: [uan@aiusa.org](mailto:uan@aiusa.org); 303.258.1170).
7. **Think creatively about how to follow up on your interfaith event,** even before the event takes place! Recognize the contributions of volunteers and supporters during the program or in a bulletin or newsletter. Maintain a list of interested volunteers to contact about future events and activities. Encourage participants to become involved in regular letter-writing opportunities through AIUSA's Interfaith Network and Interfaith Urgent Action Project (see list of resources at the end of this guide).

\* Please refer to AIUSA's *Activist Toolkit* for more complete information on organizing general events and action opportunities: [www.amnestyusa.org/activist\\_toolkit](http://www.amnestyusa.org/activist_toolkit).

“There is no ‘good cause’ for torture. As a torturer, you are the first to be a victim because you lose all your humanity. You do harm to yourself in the act of harming another. If you had a good cause to begin with, it is lost when you torture another human being.”

- Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh

## **Building human rights action within your faith community: Creating a supportive space for discussion**

Are you just starting a human rights discussion with members of your faith community? This is a great starting point for raising awareness and inspiring reflection and action in support of human rights. The below discussion guide may be useful as you initiate a human rights-focused discussion.

Open discussion is one of the best ways to engage members of your faith community to express their viewpoints and hear what others have to say on the issue, leading to greater understanding. For this reason, any discussion on human rights requires a supportive space in which all can feel at ease expressing their opinions.

**Here are some suggestions that will aid in ensuring a comfortable and productive discussion about human rights and, more specifically, the use of torture in today's world.**

- Prepare yourself as the discussion facilitator. This means planning an agenda, considering possible time limits, preparing provocative questions, etc.
- Begin the session by welcoming all participants and explaining the intention of the discussion. Review the agenda, agree on time boundaries, and explain the following ground rules for considerate interaction:
  - Speak from your own experience.
  - Actively listen to other participants and consider what they are communicating.
  - Do not interrupt anyone.
  - Do not attack personally those who offer differing opinions.
- Allow those participating in the discussion to introduce themselves. Employ a creative icebreaker so that people can get to know each other before becoming involved in a discussion. This personal contact will help humanize the discourse.
- Steer the discussion toward including as many of the participants as possible. Each participant should feel that s/he has been allowed time and space to present his or her views.
- Work toward balancing the various viewpoints, allowing as many perspectives as possible to be articulated.
- Focus on facilitating the discussion, not offering your own viewpoint. There should be other people present who can raise concerns similar to yours about the use of torture and ill treatment.
- Be prepared to initiate the discussion and to keep it flowing. One tactic is to read excerpts from books, articles, or letters to the editor, quotes from well-known people, or other statements that raise different points of view, in order to elicit responses from the discussion group. Inspirational quotes from former prisoners and other individuals who have been helped by Amnesty International letter writers are available at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/success/index.do>.
- Distribute copies of AIUSA's fact sheets (fact sheets on torture are included in the June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide, available at [www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture](http://www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture)).

*Thank you to Kristin Houlé and the National Weekend of Faith in Action on the Death Penalty (NWFPA) for sharing this discussion guide. For more information on the 2005 NWFPA, please visit [www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction](http://www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction).*

**“The devaluing and debasement of any human life impacts all people and is in violation of all faith traditions that hold sacred the holiness of life.”**

*- The Rev. Dr. Gwynne Guibord, Chair, The Interfaith Alliance*

## Consider the following three-point approach to discussion and action:

### Build Awareness

*For over three years Amnesty International has reported allegations of torture, ill-treatment and deaths of those held in US custody in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantánamo, and elsewhere. [For more information, please refer to the fact sheets and resources provided in the full June 26<sup>th</sup> Organizing Guide.]*

What is going on and why is it happening? What are the effects of these actions? Who is making the decisions and who is benefiting? Who/what has been successful in addressing the problem? Who is a source of inspiration?

### Create Space for Reflection

*Many religious groups and organizations have made strong statements against the use of torture around the world. See the resource list below or contact faith leaders within your community to learn more about what your faith tradition has said about the use of torture.*

Consider your own values and what faith brings to this subject. What have leaders of your faith community and other religious communities said about the use of torture? Are there social justice teachings and reflections to consider? How does your spirituality inform and inspire your understanding of current social issues?

### Take Action

*Providing a space to discuss action opportunities is essential. Please consider the resources and action materials available from Amnesty International USA's Interfaith Network and the Denounce Torture initiative.*

What action is necessary? Given your resources, what can you and your faith community do to make a difference? Are there obvious allies at the local, national and international level to whom you can turn for solidarity and support?

#### A Poem for My Mother by Jamil

You ask me how my mother lives --  
Please do not wait to hear.

You ask me how my mother lives --  
Words cannot speak her tears.

I know not even where to start,  
Which door might open to  
The darkness in my mother's heart  
Blacked out by censored cards.

My mother's heart remains a void  
Yet papered round with pain  
My mother's heart remains a void  
Since Yassin went away.

*- Extract from a poem by Jamil whose brother, Yassin Qassim Muhammad Isma'il, a Yemeni national, is held in Guantánamo Bay, by the US authorities. The poem was given to AI in April 2004 during a conference in Yemen.*

“If we truly understand humanity as a people and all human beings as equals, then can we put a true human heart to the struggle to end torture. Then and only then will our singular support for the fight against torture be able to empower every human being to defend the values for which we stand. Then and only then will we be able to ensure that perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including cruel, inhuman and degrading acts of torture are brought to justice.”

*- Anthony Ibeagba, family member of torture survivors, Nigeria*

## Resources for prayer and reflection:

Rabbis for Human Rights – Campaign Against Torture

(Press releases and relevant resolutions)

<http://www.rhr-na.org/initiatives/torture.html>

Council on American-Islamic Relations: Anti-Torture Campaign

(Facts and figures, with action opportunities)

<http://www.cair-net.org/antitorture/>

International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture

(Prayers for Torture Victims and other resources)

[http://ns3810.ovh.net/~fiacat/en/article.php?id\\_article=69](http://ns3810.ovh.net/~fiacat/en/article.php?id_article=69)

A Buddhist Perspective on the Abuse of Prisoners in Iraq

(A question and answer session with the Honorable Thich Nhat Hanh)

[http://www.prajnaparamita.com/new\\_page\\_15.htm](http://www.prajnaparamita.com/new_page_15.htm)

A Memorial Litany: Ashes, Stones and Flowers

By Rev. Patricia Pierce & Rabbi Arthur Waskow

<http://www.shalomctr.org/index.cfm/action/read/section/iraq/article/article618.html>

## Torture Treatment Centers and Resources

The Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (TASSC)

(Features great speakers lists and resource materials)

<http://tassc.org>

The Center for Justice and Accountability

(Extensive list of local and national torture treatment centers in over 15 states)

[www.cja.org/relatedLinks/relatedLinks.shtml](http://www.cja.org/relatedLinks/relatedLinks.shtml)

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)

(Global directory of rehabilitation centers and programs)

[www.irct.org](http://www.irct.org)

“Torture can never be eradicated, but you can make it shameful enough so its use is cut down. Recently I keep dreaming about these broken young adults. They haunt me, remind me what torture does to the human soul. And perhaps ask me to remind others, too, which I am doing today.”

- Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, excerpted from *"Where is the uproar that should stop torture today?"* (May 23, 2005)

“Our faith calls each of us to live out the gospel, and that gospel insists that, like Jesus, we speak truth to power. To speak the truth about the horrors of torture, to challenge government, church, and other leaders to denounce torture is simply my moral obligation and, quite frankly, I believe it is the moral obligation of every human being on this planet.”

- Sister Dianna Ortiz, Ursuline nun and torture survivor

“God is hiding in the world. Our task is to let the divine emerge from our deeds.”

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

## **Anti-Torture Coalition Calls for Independent Bi-Partisan Commission on Torture and Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment (CID)**

*Signatories include: Amnesty International USA, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Muslim American Political Action Committee (MAPAC), National Immigration Forum, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, and Veterans for Common Sense.*

As gruesome revelations of abuse and torture of detainees held by the United States in Iraq, Afghanistan, Guantánamo Bay, and America prisons continue to surface, our elected officials and law enforcement authorities have not held accountable those at the highest levels of responsibility. Some officials have even sought to justify these brutal actions on national security grounds.

The United Nations Convention against Torture, of which the United States is a signatory, clearly states that ‘no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.’

The torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of prisoners must end because:

1. Torture and CID are wrong. Human instinct repels at the image of bound and naked prisoners being subjected to whatever cruelties the mind can construct. It does not take a legal scholar to recognize that forcing a prisoner’s head under water, hanging him by his wrists or threatening rape by dogs must be prohibited by any civilized society.
2. Torture and CID not useful. Throughout history, it has been clearly demonstrated that torture does not produce useful information for interrogators. It did not uncover ‘heretics’ in the Inquisition and it will not ensure public safety today. A recent letter to Congress from twelve retired high ranking military officials, including former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili, noted that the use of torture is not supported by established military doctrine and that ‘such interrogation methods produce unreliable results and often impede further intelligence collection.’
3. Torture and CID dehumanize those who use it. No human being or society that engages in or allows torture can maintain respect for either human life or the rule of law.
4. Torture and CID place all prisoners everywhere in danger. The use of torture by one side in a conflict is often used by the other side as a false justification for retaliation in kind. Americans worldwide are thus placed in greater danger of being tortured.
5. Torture and CID harm America’s image and interests. We cannot expect people in other nations to accept our statements in support of human rights and freedom as long as we use torture or acquiesce in the use of torture by other nations.
6. Torture and CID being used most often against prisoners of one faith. Every revelation of the use of torture by American personnel appears to involve a prisoner of the Muslim faith. This fact does not go unnoticed in an Islamic world already suspicious of American intentions toward Islam and Muslims.

Along with an end to the use of torture and CID by American personnel, there must be an end to so-called ‘renditions,’ or sending prisoners to other nations with the understanding that they will be tortured. This practice not only violates American and international laws and norms, it decreases respect worldwide for our nation’s values and goals.

We therefore urge that an independent bi-partisan commission, with subpoena powers, be established to inform the American people about the extent of this stain on our national honor and to bring our nation’s actions into compliance with the Constitution, international law and long-standing American values of justice and respect for human dignity.

## **Denounce Torture: Stop It Now Petition to the US Government**

Torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is despicable, immoral, illegal, and always wrong. The President and other government officials, both civilian and military, should publicly denounce these acts in the strongest possible terms, and should never authorize, utilize, or condone them, not least in my name.

Every government should not only condemn, but also prosecute to the full extent of the law any such acts, whether committed on its territory or anywhere else in the world. No one should be held in secret, beyond the eyes of the law, where such acts can flourish.

No government should send or return anyone to any place where such acts are known to be routine or likely to be committed. The use of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment does not ensure safety or yield good intelligence.

Security is best achieved through governments' adherence to human rights and the rule of law, including the absolute prohibition on torture. The use of torture is an affront to human dignity that can never be justified and must be opposed in every country of the world.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

-Please send completed petitions to: Denounce Torture, 600 Pennsylvania Ave 5<sup>th</sup> Fl, Washington DC, 20003-

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Take Further Action for Human Rights with AIUSA

### ***Denounce Torture: Stop It Now!***

June 26th marks the first national mobilization connected to AIUSA's major year-long grassroots mobilization *Denounce Torture: Stop It Now!* If you have not yet registered to receive further *Denounce Torture* organizing materials and action opportunities, please sign up today by visiting [www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/denounce\\_torture.html](http://www.amnestyusa.org/stoptorture/denounce_torture.html). For more information, contact Eric Sears ([esears@aiusa.org](mailto:esears@aiusa.org); 202.544.0200, ext. 243).

### **AIUSA's Interfaith Network**

The mission of the Interfaith Network is to mobilize people and communities of faith to take action to stop human rights abuses, particularly against those who are persecuted for their religious beliefs or identity; to support people of faith who are on the front line of the human rights struggle; and to strengthen the cultural and religious diversity of AIUSA's members and allies. Join the Interfaith Network to receive periodic action alerts, annual holiday actions, and various interfaith organizing materials. Please visit [www.amnestyusa.org/interfaith](http://www.amnestyusa.org/interfaith) to join or contact [networks@aiusa.org](mailto:networks@aiusa.org) to learn more.

### **The Interfaith Urgent Action Project**

Many Interfaith Network members and other faith communities use Urgent Action appeals as the basis for monthly group meetings. Sign up online at [www.amnestyusa.org/urgent/register.html](http://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent/register.html) and be sure to select "I want to join the Interfaith Urgent Action Project" under the "Options" section (actions on torture are also available, but may not necessarily be sent out in time for monthly meetings). For more information, contact Natasha Nummedal ([nnummedal@aiusa.org](mailto:nnummedal@aiusa.org); 303.258.1170).

### **National Weekend of Faith in Action on the Death Penalty**

The National Weekend of Faith in Action (NWFA) is an opportunity for communities throughout the country to devote a weekend to reflect on, discuss, and take action to abolish the death penalty, within the context of their own faith traditions. This year, the NWFA is scheduled for October 21-23, 2005. For more information contact Kristin Houle ([khoule@aiusa.org](mailto:khoule@aiusa.org); 202.544.0200 ext 496) or register online at [www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction](http://www.amnestyusa.org/faithinaction).

### **Amnesty Events in Your Area**

To learn more about local events and actions, please visit [www.amnestyusa.org/events](http://www.amnestyusa.org/events) or contact your regional office at 1-866-A-REGION.