

September 7, 2006

Dr. Tuomo Tikkanen  
President  
European Federation of Psychologists Association  
Grasmark 108 / 18  
B 1000 Brussels  
Belgium

Dear Dr. Tikkanen,

It was a pleasure to meet with you and your colleagues in Athens, and I very much appreciate the opportunity to share with you the position of the American Psychological Association on the enormously important issue of ethics and interrogations. I would like first to make clear the position of the American Psychological Association: Psychologists never participate in, condone, or in any manner facilitate torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment at any time or in any place. Such behaviors are antithetical to the very identity of a healing professional and are in every instance unethical. Moreover, a psychologist's ethical obligations entail intervening to stop abuse from occurring and calling abuse to the attention of authorities when it does occur. In regard to the recent history of this issue, members of our association approached our Ethics Office in 2004, and asked APA to clarify the ethical guidelines that govern information-gathering processes, such as interrogations.

The APA responded by creating the Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security (a copy of which was provided to you when we met), that sets forth strict ethical guidelines whenever psychologists are involved in information-gathering or interrogation processes. The Task Force based the ethical guidelines on the APA Ethics Code. Subsequent to this task force report, the Council of Representatives, our highest governing body, stated that there are no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether induced by a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, that may be invoked as a justification for torture, including the invocation of laws, regulations, or orders." This action, taken in August 2005, was followed by additional action in August of 2006, when our Council emphasized the centrality of international human rights standards to our ethical analyses and stated that psychologists must follow international human rights instruments relevant to their roles. The Council of Representatives made explicit mention of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the Principles of Medical Ethics relevant to the Role of Health Personnel, particularly Physicians, in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners; and the Principles of Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. A recent book, "Oath Betrayed," by medical ethicist Steven Miles, praises a psychologist who served on our Task Force on psychological ethics and national security, for engaging in a "successful medical protest of prisoner abuse" at Guantanamo Bay. It was extremely encouraging to note that this psychologist, far from being disciplined, received a very positive professional response for his actions. The military's response to APA's work in this area has been characterized by openness and engagement, and APA

has been encouraged by recent developments in our law. In June, for example, the United States Supreme Court ruled on a case involving a detainee at Guantanamo Bay, and subsequent to this case the Deputy Defense Secretary stated that the Geneva Conventions apply to all detainees. In addition, I have been informed that the army will soon release an updated version of its policies which will be quite consistent with our members philosophy and ethics regarding interrogations. There is no disagreement whatsoever among our membership about what an ethical interrogation looks like it is based on building rapport and does not involve torture or any type of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. All of the military psychologists within APA whom I am aware of are in complete agreement and would see any type of abusive treatment as both unethical and directly contradictory to their purpose. APA is working with the military to ensure that this approach is shared by all who engage in interrogation practices, so that information potentially relevant to preventing future acts of violence is always gathered in a manner that protects the safety of all involved in the interrogation process. I hope I have been responsive to your concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions. Sincerely,

Gerald P. Koocher, PhD  
APA President