



U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Legal Counsel

Office of the Assistant Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

December 30, 2004

MEMORANDUM FOR JAMES B. COMEY
DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL

Re: *Legal Standards Applicable Under 18 U.S.C. §§ 2340-2340A*

Torture is abhorrent both to American law and values and to international norms. This universal repudiation of torture is reflected in our criminal law, for example, 18 U.S.C. §§ 2340-2340A; international agreements, exemplified by the United Nations Convention Against Torture (the "CAT");¹ customary international law;² centuries of Anglo-American law;³ and the longstanding policy of the United States, repeatedly and recently reaffirmed by the President.⁴

This Office interpreted the federal criminal prohibition against torture—codified at 18 U.S.C. §§ 2340-2340A—in *Standards of Conduct for Interrogation under 18 U.S.C. §§ 2340-2340A* (Aug. 1, 2002) ("August 2002 Memorandum"). The August 2002 Memorandum also addressed a number of issues beyond interpretation of those statutory provisions, including the President's Commander-in-Chief power, and various defenses that might be asserted to avoid potential liability under sections 2340-2340A. *See id.* at 31-46.

Questions have since been raised, both by this Office and by others, about the

¹ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Dec. 10, 1984, S. Treaty Doc. No. 100-20, 1465 U.N.T.S. 85. *See also, e.g.,* International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171.

² It has been suggested that the prohibition against torture has achieved the status of *jus cogens* (i.e., a peremptory norm) under international law. *See, e.g.,* *Siderman de Blake v. Republic of Argentina*, 965 F.2d 699, 714 (9th Cir. 1992); *Regina v. Bow Street Metro. Stipendiary Magistrate Ex Parte Pinochet Ugarte* (No. 3), [2000] 1 AC 147, 198; *see also* Restatement (Third) of Foreign Relations Law of the United States § 702 reporters' note 5.

³ *See generally* John H. Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof: Europe and England in the Ancien Régime* (1977).

⁴ *See, e.g.,* Statement on United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 40 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 1167 (July 5, 2004) ("Freedom from torture is an inalienable human right . . ."); Statement on United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 39 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 824 (June 30, 2003) ("Torture anywhere is an affront to human dignity everywhere."); *see also* Letter of Transmittal from President Ronald Reagan to the Senate (May 20, 1988), in *Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, S. Treaty Doc. No. 100-20, at iii (1988) ("Ratification of the Convention by the United States will clearly express United States opposition to torture, an abhorrent practice unfortunately still prevalent in the world today.");

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