

June 17, 2009

The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General of the United States
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Holder:

We write to urge you to release the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) report on its investigation into Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) legal advice that authorized abusive interrogations during the post-9/11 period. Release of this report is an essential step in making a clean break with the abusive practices, excessive secrecy, and faulty legal reasoning that have marred the United States' reputation as a country that upholds the rule of law.

We welcomed your decision to release several OLC memoranda that authorized the use of abusive and illegal interrogation techniques such as waterboarding, forced nakedness, stress positions, and exposure to frigid temperatures. But within the four corners of these legal documents is only a small part of the picture. When you released nine of the OLC memoranda in March you stated, "Americans deserve a government that operates with transparency and openness." By releasing the OPR report you will demonstrate the administration's continuing commitment to transparency and openness. You will also help strengthen a proper understanding of the important role played by government lawyers serving the United States.

The OLC served as a linchpin of the Bush administration's strategy of relying on faulty legal justifications to rationalize its policy of official cruelty and to circumvent the law on humane treatment. The memos made unprecedented legal claims, ignored highly relevant case law, and reached clearly erroneous conclusions, including that the President is not necessarily bound by statutes prohibiting torture. To prevent future abuse and to restore the proper role of the OLC in providing accurate and principled legal advice, it is imperative that the public be made fully aware of how brutal conduct came to be authorized. The American people have a right to know how the U.S. Justice Department came to issue legal opinions approving acts of cruelty that shocked the world, damaged U.S. moral authority and harmed efforts to combat terrorism effectively.

OPR began its review of this matter over four years ago. The completion of its final report is long overdue. Requests for release of the OPR report have been met with excessive delay and insufficient explanations. We urge you to release the OPR report now and send a clear message that transparency in government and adherence to the law are core American values as well as key assets to U.S. national security.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union

Amnesty International, USA

Brennan Center for Justice

Center for Constitutional Rights

Center for the Study of Human Rights in the Americas

Human Rights First

Human Rights Watch

International Center for Transitional Justice

International Justice Network

National Religious Campaign Against Torture

Open Society Institute

Physicians for Human Rights

Rutherford Institute