

# **Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis Leadership Statement on Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners**

*May 17, 2004*

**We, the Central Board of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis, join our voices with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and other faith-based organizations and human rights groups in expressing our abhorrence and shame at the abuse perpetrated on Iraqi prisoners by some members of the US military. These inexcusable atrocities violate our common humanity.**

**We do not believe that this torture was the result of a few members of the military, as our government officials would have us believe. We recognize that in most cases members of the military act with honor and a deep sense of duty. Yet, we see these abuses as symptomatic of a culture of violence. We are all responsible, those in roles of leadership in our country, military leadership who did not assure that training on human rights was a priority, and all of us who have been in anyway responsible for promoting this culture of violence.**

**In 1996, the Department of Defense was forced to admit that a training manual used by the School of the Americas to train soldiers in Central and Latin America included inappropriate forms of interrogation, what we would call torture. Many of us are calling for closure of this school. Now more than ever, we see that this culture of torture and violence is indeed becoming more and more systemic.**

**The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis represent over 400 sisters and 80 associates in the United States. We, the Central Board, join with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in demanding that the following actions be taken to begin to address these serious violations of human dignity and human rights:**

Now that President Bush has issued a late and limited apology for the abusive treatment of Iraqi prisoners, that there be a thorough investigation, and that the results be made public.

That this investigation include any personnel regardless of rank or office who had knowledge of these atrocities and allowed them to continue with impunity

That any military, intelligence, or privately contracted personnel found to have engaged in or encouraged acts of torture or inhumane treatment be prosecuted

That there be a complete and public Congressional oversight hearing and investigation into the treatment of all detainees held by the U.S. military anywhere in the world, an investigation which will allow Members of Congress to exercise their powers and rights to enable the balance of power to be restored.

That all prisoners held by the United States be granted access to international monitoring groups such as the Red Cross, the Red Crescent, Amnesty International, and the United Nations

That US government and military officials make a commitment to protect the human dignity and rights of the Iraqi people.

That the military and independent contractors be fully educated as to their responsibilities to uphold the human rights of all prisoners under their control according to the dictates of the Geneva Convention and military law.

As leaders of a religious congregation we reach out to our Muslim sisters and brothers. We grieve with you. We share your outrage. As members of a Franciscan religious congregation we believe that we are all connected in this world. When one group of people is hurt, we are all diminished. We will continue to pray and work for social justice, peace, and respect for human dignity and human rights of all people.

As a nation we share in the shame. Together we must work to assure that these abuses never happen again.

Sincerely,

The Central Board of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis

Sr. Jeanne Conzemius

Sr. Valerie Kulbacki

Sr. Mary Alice Jarosz