

# WHEN IS A CRIME SO GREAT?



MATT WUERKER

## HUMAN RIGHTS DENIAL MERITS IMPEACHMENT

BY PETER PHILLIPS

Human Rights belong to people collectively. To believe in rights for some and not others is a denial of the humanness of people worldwide. Yet, denial is exactly what Congress and George W. Bush did with the signing of the Military Commission Act of 2006. The new official U.S. policy is that torture and suspension of due process are acceptable for anyone the President deems to be a terrorist or terrorist supporter. This act is the overt denial of the inalienable rights of human beings propagated in our Declaration of Independence and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Our famous words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," did not declare that some men (and women) are without unalienable rights. Our independence was founded on the belief that all men and women are recognized by this nation as having innate rights derived from their humanness.

Likewise, the Universal Declaration of Rights, created by the United Nations in 1948 and signed and ratified by the U.S. Congress, specifies in its preamble that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a treaty that legally binds the United States government. Article 10 states that "everyone is entitled to full equality, to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him," and Article 5 specifically prohibits torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

For the U.S. government to unilaterally declare that our country will not comply with international human rights laws, nor uphold the core values of our nation's foundation is an indication of extremism that supersedes the values and beliefs of the

American people. When such an extremism exists, we may need to take seriously the founders' declaration that, "to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

The U.S. government is actively torturing people to death. One need only read the 44 official U.S. military autopsy reports on civilian detainees from Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 to 2004 posted on the American Civil Liberties website to see the horrendous details of death by "strangulation," asphyxiation, and "blunt force injuries."

The Military Commission Act retroactively approved the use of torture to the beginning of the 9/11 Wars. Congress's reaction to the ACLU report of October 2005 was to pass legislation banning further use of the Freedom of Information Act to request documents on current military operations.

We are in a time of extremism, permanent war, and the unilateral manifestation of ethnocentrism and power by an openly public cabal of people in the U.S. government. Those in power are set on the U.S. military domination of the world. They seem willing to defy the foundational values of the American people to achieve their ends. We have no choice but to declare openly our belief in universal human rights and demand the immediate impeachment of George W. Bush and Richard Cheney and a full accounting of those in their administration.

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BY ROBERT SHETTERLY

Before the votes were even counted, a strange chorus arose, like toads from the swamp, from every point on the Democratic compass — so persistent, one might even think it choreographed — croaking in dire basso, "Now's the time to work on fulfilling the Democratic agenda, not the time to hold anyone accountable for the massive corruption or the extraordinary lies that got us into this mess." Let's be moderate, let's be wise, the toads all intoned, let's don't disintegrate in partisan bickering about who's responsible. And, pulleeeeeease, don't even utter the word impeachment. No, no, no, let's repeal the tax cuts for the rich, raise the minimum wage, enact universal health care, raise the mileage on our cars, sign on to the Kyoto Protocol, reduce the debt, fund our schools, fix Social Security, and work in a bipartisan way toward an exit strategy from Iraq. All very sensible. Every single one of those things needs to be fought for if we want to have economic and social justice.

But, that's not enough. I thought one of the cornerstones of our democratic republic was the rule of law. Transparency. Accountability. We hold people accountable so every bozo with a zip-gun won't stick up a 7-11 for 50 bucks or start a preemptive war by lying to the people. We sent a Japanese soldier to prison for 25 years after World War 2 for waterboarding a United States soldier; we hung Adolph Eichman. I'm trying to imagine what our response would have been after that war if the Nazis had said, "Look, we lost the war, our cities are rubble, our people starving, we have no infrastructure, don't waste your money on some stupid, inflammatory trials at Nuremburg about the people who started this war or thought the Holocaust was a cool idea. Sure, mistakes were made, but let's get on with rebuilding." Very sensible.

Massive crimes have been committed. Our administration has ridden roughshod on our Constitution as though it were a hobbled and blind cow. What-might-have-been looks like a bomb crater. So irresponsible and massive are the crimes that the perpetrators have changed the laws to avoid being held accountable for crimes against humanity. So irresponsible that their failure to act to mitigate global warming endangers the very survival of human life on our planet. Hundreds of thousands of people are unnecessarily dead, many more hundreds of thousands maimed and wounded. The incredible debt undermines our economy and will plague our children. When is a crime so great that it shouldn't be acknowledged? Or prosecuted? Do we pat Rummy & Dickie & Georgie & Connie on the butt and send them to the bench with a "Nice game, kids. Let's all be good sports and let someone else have a go at it?" Live and let live.

Behind all the outrageous events of this era — Iraq, global warming, the debt, election fraud, war profiteering, failure to create alternative energies, species extinction — is a culture of non-accountability, cronyism, and obscene profit. How will it stop? Raising the minimum wage by \$1.50 over three years might not do it. Arrogance, deceit and blatant crime are responsible for these crises. Not poor execution. Accountability is the way out. There is no reason why we can't pass fair, life-saving legislation at the same time. We can walk and chew gum. We have grown so accustomed to living in a world of euphemism and doublespeak, so accustomed to not calling reality by its name, that we think there is no reality except what we can get away with, the reality that sells the product or "develops the resource." Not true. Nature won't be fooled. And we only imperil ourselves and our cherished institutions if we don't hold ourselves accountable. It's not about partisan revenge, it's about naming the crime. Some very bad people have broken our laws, dashed our hopes, mortgaged our futures, broken our hearts, and betrayed our country. They need to pay the piper. If we don't hold them accountable, who will we allow to hold us accountable for making things right?

It's a platitude to say that political progress is the art of compromise. We compromise in order to share as much justice and opportunity as evenly as we can. But when great crimes have been committed by our elected leaders, we shouldn't compromise with our sense of justice. It's hard to admit because as citizens we are responsible, too. But that responsibility demands an accounting, demands an earning back of national integrity by investigating the depth of the crimes. That's called maturity. Our leaders have inflicted an enormous trauma on Iraq and on us. We will all be much healthier if we heal by inquiry and justice rather than repression.

Robert Shatterly is a writer and artist who lives in Brookville, Maine. He is the author of *Americans Who Tell The Truth*. His article has been reprinted from *CommonDreams.org*.

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