

GA-1329
(Sense-of-the-Assembly)
SUPPORTING A TREATY for the PREVENTION OF TORTURE

Adopted by the General Assembly

WHEREAS, the vision of our Church is “To be a faithful, growing church, that demonstrates true community, deep Christian spirituality and a passion for justice”; and

WHEREAS, on July 21 – 25, 2007, the General Assembly which met in Fort Worth, Texas, adopted business item 0721 “Elimination of Torture”; and

WHEREAS, all individuals are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and therefore worthy of honor and respect by other human beings (1 John 4:20); and

WHEREAS, Jesus calls us to love our enemies (Luke 6:27) and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12); and

WHEREAS, international treaties banning torture exist, and though under laws of most nations torture is illegal, it still occurs; and

WHEREAS, the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT)¹ is an international treaty that requires ratifying countries to set up “National Preventive Mechanisms” (NPMs) aimed to prevent torture and abuse in places of confinement including: jails, prisons, mental health facilities, immigration detention centers, detainee centers like Guantanamo, and police stations²; and

WHEREAS, as of December 7, 2012, sixty-five countries have ratified OPCAT and an additional twenty-one countries have signed OPCAT³; and

WHEREAS, by joining with those nations that have already signed and ratified OPCAT the United States and Canada would ensure thorough review that torture and abuse does not occur in its places of confinement; and

WHEREAS, through OPCAT’s review and oversight, cases of abuse and torture may be prevented or deterred⁴; and

WHEREAS, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) is a coalition of denominations and faith groups – local, regional, and national – that mobilizes people of faith to end torture in U.S. policy, practice and culture; and

¹ Text of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture treaty is at: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cat-one.htm>.

² More information on OPCAT is available at www.nrcat.org/opcat.

³ A list of countries that have ratified or signed the treaty is at: http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-9-b&chapter=4&lang=en.

⁴ News stories about the Jon Burge case: <http://articles.chicagotribune.com/keyword/jon-burge>.

WHEREAS, NRCAT has produced a film, *Preventing Torture Everywhere*, on OPCAT and an accompanying study guide for churches or campus ministries⁵; and

WHEREAS, over 5,500 individuals and 38 religious organizations (including our General Minister and President) — have signed a statement by NRCAT calling on the U.S. to join OPCAT⁶;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Orlando, Florida on July 13 – 17, 2013, affirms our declaration “that any and all use of torture is totally unacceptable – that it is contrary to the Word of God and in opposition to the foundational principles of a democratic society” (0721 “The Elimination of Torture); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this General Assembly endorses NRCAT’s statement in support of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (see full text below); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we call upon President Obama and Prime Minister Harper to sign OPCAT and the U.S. Senate and Canadian Parliament to ratify OPCAT; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we ask General Minister and President Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins to write to President Obama and Prime Minister Harper stating the substance of this resolution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this General Assembly joins in preventing torture in the United States and Canada by urging Disciples to advocate for the treaty; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that when engaging in thoughtful and prayerful evaluation of such issues as domestic policy, foreign policy, military procedures, and interrogation techniques, Disciples members, activists and leaders are encouraged to do so in light of this resolution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this resolution and the statement of the NRCAT will be promoted by the Office of the General Minister and President and by Disciples Communication Ministries through our electronic media and social media outlets to all expressions of the church with a request for serious consideration and study of this issue and an invitation to endorse the NRCAT statement on OPCAT; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that Disciples are encouraged to join organizations, coalitions and campaigns working for the total elimination of torture in any and all circumstances.

Park Avenue Christian Church, New York

⁵ (see www.nrcat.org/opcat_video)

⁶ (see www.nrcat.org/opcat)

Statement on the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture By the National Religious Campaign Against Torture⁷

The U.S. Should Act to Prevent Torture Everywhere

Torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment are contrary to our common religious belief in the fundamental dignity of each human being. We call upon the U.S. government, once a leader in the effort to end the use of torture, to reclaim that role by signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

One of the most important steps a nation can take to end torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is to provide independent oversight of the conditions in which people are detained. By creating mechanisms that can prevent torture, including international inspection teams, OPCAT builds upon the prohibition against torture contained in the Convention Against Torture, a treaty to which the U.S. is already a party and which is U.S. law. OPCAT requires each nation that ratifies the treaty to develop its own independent mechanism for monitoring detention facilities, including prisons and police stations.

We believe that if the U.S. joins OPCAT and provides robust oversight of its places of detention, it will be significantly more difficult for cases of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment to occur within the U.S. Ratifying OPCAT would also enhance our government's effectiveness in urging other countries to end their use of torture.

As people of many faiths and creeds, we oppose torture. We call upon our government to do everything it can to prevent torture everywhere. We call upon the President to sign OPCAT, and we call upon the U.S. Senate to ratify it.

⁷ The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a member of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture.