

Statement on APA Ethics Office Decision to
Dismiss Charges Against Dr. John Leso
March 1, 2014

The International Society for Ethical Psychology and Psychiatry joins with Psychologists for Social Responsibility and the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology in denouncing the American Psychological Association's recent refusal to take disciplinary action against military psychologist Dr. John Leso for his involvement in torturous interrogations at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This is yet another in a line of failures by the APA to enforce the most basic ethical standards as outlined in their Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct and the long-standing APA-stated policy against torture, effectively hollowing out their public statements that any APA member so involved will be held accountable. APA's actions in this case weaken psychology's reputation as a humane endeavor independent of governmental influence, and place in question APA's standing as a legitimate national organization for psychology.

The extant evidence cannot be clearer. Documentation¹ confirms that Dr. Leso participated in the development, planning, and execution of coercive interrogation techniques on Mohammed al Qahtani during Dr. Leso's tenure with the Behavioral Science Consultation Team in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, between June 2002 and January 2003. By all authoritative standards at the time of his actions, the interrogation techniques were considered torture and a violation of the APA Ethics Code. Even the U.S. convening authority on military commissions during the presidency of George W. Bush concluded Qahtani was tortured, which contaminated any evidence, and thus she declined to pursue prosecution for his alleged involvement in the 9/11 attacks.

We urge the APA to reconsider their decision, to open a transparent and substantive investigation into this allegation, and to fulfill its promise to enforce the prohibition against psychologists engaging in torture. To do otherwise will set a very dangerous precedent.

¹ Refer to the February 10, 2014 statement by the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology for a detailed description of the evidence.