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June 23, 2009

The Honorable Eric H. Holder
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

We, the undersigned health professionals, write to share our concerns that your office's reluctance to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate potential crimes by former officials involved in torturing detainees is endangering our nation's stated fundamental values and our credibility as a nation that values and defends human rights.

The investigation of potential crimes, as others have shown, holds profound implications for our nation's international legitimacy and future opportunities to credibly promote human rights. It also holds immense importance for the future historical record, as well as the necessary policy debates addressing detention, surveillance, and other violations of civil liberties under the Obama administration going forward.

Our concern here is more specific, reflecting our particular expertise as health professionals. Some mental health professionals and physicians abandoned our profession's ethical commitment to "do no harm" and instead facilitated the abuse and torture of detainees in U.S. custody.

For example, when detainees were waterboarded, or shackled by their hands and feet to induce sleep deprivation, medical personnel and psychologists calibrated the intensity of abuse to ensure that it could continue. In addition, some military and intelligence psychologists helped design, conduct, and teach abusive interrogation techniques used by the CIA and Department of Defense.

Our professions' participation in these abuses is an appalling affront to not only our ethical code, but also the law. Efforts within our professions to hold our members accountable for their role in torture are part of the solution, but do not complete it. Nor can those efforts reach other officials outside our professions who also enabled or conducted detainee abuse. Until our nation investigates and prosecutes those responsible for torturing detainees, the future use of torture will remain a risk facing our nation, our professions, and their respective values.

We urge you, in your capacity as our nation's senior prosecutor, to restore the rule of law by ensuring its equal application to all.

Respectfully submitted,
The undersigned health professionals

cc: The Honorable David Ogden, Deputy Attorney General
The Honorable Lanny A. Breuer, Assistant Attorney General, Criminal Division
Members of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary

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