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Donald Trump, Torturer in Chief

By Cesar Chelala
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Among the many controversial statements made by Mr. Donald Trump, his recent one on the use of waterboarding tops them all. Speaking at a rally in Ohio, when asked if the U.S. should use waterboarding to extract confessions from prisoners, Trump said, “I like it a lot. I don’t think it’s tough enough.” It was an irresponsible statement by a man who knows no moderation on serious issues.

Waterboarding is a form of torture in which water is poured over a cloth covering the face and breathing passages of a person, causing the individual to experience the sensation of drowning. It causes not only extreme pain, but also damages the lungs and the brain due to oxygen deprivation. In addition, it may cause lasting psychological damage and death. It is among the cruelest forms of torture.

In May of 2008, the British-American journalist Christopher Hitchens decided to undergo waterboarding by veterans of the Special Forces, to test on himself if it could be considered torture. He was pinioned by his wrists and he was cut off from the sunlight by a black hood. Afterwards he was turned around several times to disorient him and placed onto a sloping board and positioned with his head lower than his heart.

“You may have read by now the official lie about this treatment, which is that it ‘simulates’ the feeling of drowning. This is not the case. You feel that you are drowning -or, rather, being drowned, albeit slowly and under controlled conditions and at the mercy of those who are applying the pressure. The ‘board’ is the instrument, not the method. You are not being boarded. You are being watered...

“In this pregnant darkness, head downward, I waited for a while until I abruptly felt a slow cascade of water going up my nose. Determined to resist if only for the honor of my navy ancestors who had so often been in peril on the sea, I held my breath for a while and then had to exhale and –as you might expect- inhale in turn. The inhalation brought the damp cloths tight against my nostrils, as if a huge, wet paw had been suddenly and annihilatingly clamped over my face...

“Unable to determine whether I was breathing in or out, and flooded more with sheer panic than with mere water, I triggered the pre-arranged signal and felt the unbelievable relief of being pulled upright and having the soaking and stifling layers pulled off me. I find I don’t want to tell you how little time I lasted...,” wrote Hitchens. He had the procedure repeated on himself, with equally terrifying results and concluded, “Well, then, if waterboarding does not constitute torture, then there is no such thing as torture.”

In a two-year study, the Constitution Project, a U.S. independent group, concluded that it was indisputable that U.S. forces had employed torture as well as “cruel, inhuman or degrading” treatment in many interrogations; that “the nation’s most senior officials” bear ultimate responsibility for allowing and contributing to the spread of these techniques; and that there is substantial evidence that information obtained by these methods was neither useful nor reliable.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held since the 1890s that punishments that involve torture are prohibited under the Eighth Amendment, which says, “Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.”

In addition, the U.S is a party to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which originated in the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1984, and that was signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1988 and ratified by the Senate on Oct. 27, 1990.

The U.S. is also a party to the following conventions that prohibit torture: the American Convention on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights signed in 1977 and ratified in 1992.

Mr. Donald Trump, whose most valiant contribution to the Vietnam War has been to organize beauty pageants during that period, disrespects the U.S. Constitution, the country's laws and its proclaimed stand on human rights. He should have the courage (or, as Madeleine Albright, former U.S. Secretary of State poetically would put it, "the cojones") of undergoing waterboarding before giving his careless opinion on this most serious issue.