

January 5, 2004

The Honorable Arlen Specter
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick L. Leahy
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Specter and Ranking Member Leahy:

We, the undersigned religious leaders and organizations, write to express strong concern regarding the nomination of Alberto Gonzales for Attorney General of the United States.

As people with a deep commitment to racial justice, we appreciate that President Bush has nominated a number of people of color for cabinet positions. Greater racial diversity at the highest levels of government is an important step towards the Beloved Community. Like the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., we dream of a day when all people *"will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."* Therefore, as you consider Mr. Gonzales for the vital position of Attorney General, we ask that you take seriously his judgment, experience, and qualifications. We offer you the following questions and concerns from our religious perspective.

First and foremost, we as people of faith have a profound commitment to affirming the worth and dignity of all people, all of whom are children of God. We therefore have grave concerns about Mr. Gonzales' reported role in sanctioning torture. We believe that no person, including the President of the United States, has the authority to authorize torture. We can think of nothing more antithetical to our basic moral values, or detrimental to our national role as a voice for human rights throughout the world. If our highest law enforcement official is known to have sanctioned torture, and shown a willingness to disregard or evade some of the most fundamental international human rights laws, how can the United States have any credibility as we oppose repression in other nations? What basis will we have for condemning those who abuse Americans serving in the military or working abroad?

With this in mind, we urge you to vigorously investigate Mr. Gonzales' views on torture and international law, and hold him to a high moral standard of accountability for his actions. What will he do to reassure the world that the United States values human rights and international law?

Second, though we come from different faith traditions, we share a common imperative to welcome the strangers in our midst—to treat others with the respect and dignity that we expect for ourselves. Since the tragedy of September 11th, far too many people have been abused, profiled, or otherwise mistreated by law enforcement and immigration practices. We have heard far too many stories of needless suffering—of families split apart; of people deported to countries they have never known—or have tried to escape from; of good people losing jobs and friends because they were detained with little or no evidence of wrongdoing or for reasons unrelated to terrorism.

In addition to the pain and hardship these practices bring upon those directly involved, they create a broader problem by spreading fear and mistrust throughout whole communities. Sadly, those most adversely affected are Arabs and Muslims—precisely the groups with whom we desperately need trust and solidarity. As news of this mistreatment has spread, the United States has lost even more credibility abroad. By causing needless suffering, undermining domestic trust, and tarnishing our image abroad, unfair law enforcement and immigration practices have made America considerably less safe.

With this in mind, we urge you to investigate whether or not Mr. Gonzales will continue these immoral and often ineffective procedures. What, if anything, will he do to restore the trust and credibility that have been lost?

Third, we are concerned about Mr. Gonzales' views on issues of religious freedom. We believe that persons must be free to hold religious belief or unbelief without coercion, to meet together for public worship and witness, to speak prophetically from religious conviction to government and society, to practice their religious beliefs, and to be free from government intrusion, coercion, and control.

We are concerned that ethnic, national, and religious profiling by law enforcement creates an environment in which individuals regularly feel unable to exercise or that it is unwise to exercise their right to religious expression. We are concerned that the Department of Justice relaxed restrictions on surveillance of domestic religious organizations.

With this in mind, we urge you to examine Mr. Gonzales' views and record on respecting religious liberty. What will he do to ensure that all Americans—citizen and immigrant alike—feel comfortable expressing their faith, and participating in the life of their religious community?

Our nation deserves—and desperately needs—an Attorney General that will be trusted and effective at home and respected abroad. We believe that there are critical issues of religious, public, and global interest that must be addressed regarding Mr. Gonzales' nomination. In addition to evaluating his qualifications, the confirmation process is an opportunity to establish a public record of statements to which Mr. Gonzales can be held accountable if he is confirmed.

Again, we urge you to vigorously investigate Mr. Gonzales' views on critical areas including torture and international law; domestic law enforcement practices, and respect for religious liberty. We pray that religious and moral values, including fairness and respect for all people, will guide you throughout the confirmation process.

In Faith,

Debra Kolodny, Executive Director
ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal

Rev. Stan Hastey, Executive Director
Alliance of Baptists

Mary Ellen McNish, General Secretary
American Friends Service Committee

Jeanne E. Herrick-Stare, Senior Fellow for Civil Liberties and Human Rights
Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quaker)

Rev. Welton Gaddy, President
The Interfaith Alliance

Mahdi Bray, Executive Director
Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation

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Rev. Elenora Giddings Ivory, Director
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Preetmohan Singh, National Director
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Jim Winkler, General Secretary
United Methodist General Board of Church & Society

Robert Keithan, Director
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Unitarian Universalist Association

Charles Clements, President and Chief Executive Officer
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

cc: Senate Judiciary Committee