



- **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

“Zero Dark Thirty”: a gross offense to victims of torture

Geneva, 11 January 2013. “Zero Dark Thirty” is a Hollywood dramatisation of the hunt for and killing of Osama bin Laden. A central claim in the film is that the intelligence which led the CIA to bin Laden’s hideout was obtained as a result of torture.

US Senators, CIA veterans, former Guantanamo guards and prisoners, and even the CIA itself in an unusual public comment, have stated that this is not what happened. **The use of torture did not lead to any critical information which helped find the al-Qaida leader.** The main result of the torture has instead been deep suffering and further poisoning of societies.

The film director, Kathryn Bigelow, has repeated that “Zero Dark Thirty” is fiction and not a documentary. Nevertheless, the introduction of the film states that it is “based on first-hand accounts of actual events”. This leaves the audience with the false impression that torture, as presented in the film, can be effective and even necessary to combat an unknown enemy in times of national threat.

Why we are worried about this film:

“Zero Dark Thirty” exploits the anxiety and fear that took root after the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. The film is a version of the thought experiment commonly known as the “Ticking Bomb Scenario”, (“Suppose that the perpetrator of an imminent terrorist attack would disclose the information needed to prevent the attack only if he is tortured”). The “Ticking Bomb Scenario” creates suspense and is therefore appealing to script writers and producers. What we must remember is that it is created to **manipulate emotional reactions.** The scenario justifies torture as serving a greater good, and makes our sympathies fall on the perpetrator, not on the victim.

Mass media and the entertainment industry have great powers to influence perceptions and values. As a possible Oscar winner, “Zero Dark Thirty” will be seen by millions of people all over the world. By justifying - and glorifying - the use of torture it represents a gross offence to the victims of torture and to the global anti-torture movement.

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Torture is absolutely prohibited in international law. It is one of the worst offences a State can commit against persons under its care. But we are again reminded that there is still a long way to go before it is universally rejected, like genocide and slavery.

Therefore, if you see the film just remember these simple facts about torture:

- **Torture is always wrong.** It not only deeply wounds the victims, many of whom may be innocent of any crime; it has a toxic effect on the societies that tolerate it.
- **Torture is illegal.** It is a crime punishable by severe penalties wherever in the world it is committed. There are no exceptions to the absolute prohibition of torture in international law, such as conflict or instability.
- **Torture is an ineffective and unreliable means to obtain information.** It has often been observed that tortured victims will say anything just to get the pain to end. And even if the information obtained were the truth, there is no way to know if it is accurate, making it absolutely worthless as an interrogative tool. And such acts would still be wrong and illegal.

We are happy to answer any further questions. Please contact Matthew Sands, Legal adviser (msands@apt.ch) or Rosita Ericsson, communication officer (rericsson@apt.ch). Tel. + 41 22 919 21 70.