

Press Release

Tuesday, September 11, 2007
For Immediate Release

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In Unusual Step, Human Rights Groups Oppose CIA Nominee

(Washington, September 11, 2007) – Human rights groups and advocacy organizations have urged the U.S. Senate to reject the nomination of John Rizzo to serve as General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) because of his stated views on torture.

In a letter to the members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the human rights and advocacy groups cited Rizzo's testimony before the committee in June, during which he said that he had not raised any objections to the August 2002 legal memorandum on torture prepared by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel. Even in hindsight, he told the Senators, he does not feel that he should have objected to the memorandum.

Rizzo has served as acting chief legal officer at the CIA on several occasions including the most recent period of July 2004 to the present.

The now infamous "torture memo" has been widely discredited. It sparked an outcry when it came to light in 2004 for both its effort to redefine torture in an absurdly narrow way and for its radical claim that the President, as Commander-in-Chief, need not abide by laws that prohibit torture.

In his confirmation hearing in June, Rizzo testified that he found the memo "persuasive."

In their letter, sent to the Senate on September 6, the groups state that "[t]he American people relied on him – as did the President and Mr. Rizzo's colleagues at the CIA – to say "no" when offered specious legal theories redefining torture and arguing that the President can disregard duly adopted criminal statutes." To view the letter in its entirety, visit www.osipc.org

The groups – Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, Physicians for Human Rights, the Center for American Progress Action Fund, and the Open Society Policy Center – urged the committee to reject Rizzo's nomination on the basis of his testimony regarding the torture memo. These organizations rarely take positions on executive branch nominees.

The human rights and advocacy groups noted that other executive branch lawyers risked the ire of their superiors and possibly their careers when they objected to questionable legal theories and abusive interrogations.

"When Mr. Rizzo failed to object to legal arguments that defended torture, he failed to protect his clients – the President, his CIA colleagues and the American people. He compounded this failure by effectively telling the Committee that he would do the same thing again," they wrote. Confirming Mr. Rizzo to this position of trust, they said, would send an extraordinarily negative message to the world.

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