

## **Political Abuse of Psychiatry**

### **Background:**

Political abuse of psychiatry refers to the misuse of psychiatric diagnosis, treatment and detention for the purposes of obstructing the fundamental human rights of certain individuals and groups in a given society. The practice is common to but not exclusive to countries governed by totalitarian regimes. In these regimes abuses of the human rights of those politically opposed to the state are often hidden under the guise of psychiatric treatment. In democratic societies “whistle blowers” on covertly illegal practices by major corporations have been subjected to the political misuse of psychiatry.

In totalitarian states, the victims are usually those who are politically and ethically opposed to the restrictions imposed by the state, those who hold religious beliefs or who form other independent groups and those who attempt to organize unions. In democratic societies there are still individuals who are indirectly punished by the state when they expose actions of government that they believe not to be in the interests of society. Whistle blowers and those who protest against harassment by prominent figures are sometimes victims of the state directly or indirectly where the state is the accomplice of major industry. Psychiatry is usually drawn into the abuse when the behaviour is attributed to mental illness.

In totalitarian regimes psychiatrists who oppose the abuses often end up as victims of abuse themselves. It requires a higher ethic of such psychiatrists to oppose the abuses in the face of severe punishment for doing so. The majority of psychiatrists turn a blind eye and a number become willing participants with the state. The benefit to the state of hiding human rights abuses under the guise of psychiatric treatment is that they avoid international financial and other sanctions. Democratic governments are often reluctant for their own financial reasons to support investigations or to challenge the practice or to support NGO's who are prepared to challenge the practice publicly.

### **Statement:**

Global Initiative on Psychiatry opposes the political misuse of psychiatry wherever it may occur and supports those psychiatrists and psychiatric organizations that pressure the offending states to discontinue the practice and lobby vigorously those organizations which are wavering. The main way for individuals and organizations to work is through diplomatic channels. It is necessary to expose the practice and to embarrass countries that are at fault by expelling them from organizations such as the World Psychiatric Association. This can only be ensured by properly organized open investigation of psychiatric practice and interviews with the alleged victims.

Global Initiative on Psychiatry  
Position Statement on Political Abuse of Psychiatry  
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