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April 25, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Allegations of ongoing forced feeding of detainees in U.S. custody, possibly with participation by physicians, continue to be brought to our attention.

The American Medical Association (AMA) noted in 2005 and 2009, when concerns arose about the treatment of hunger strikers at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, that the forced feeding of detainees violates core ethical values of the medical profession. Every competent patient has the right to refuse medical intervention, including life-sustaining interventions.

The AMA has long endorsed the World Medical Association Declaration of Tokyo, which is unequivocal on the point: "Where a prisoner refuses nourishment and is considered by the physician as capable of forming an unimpaired and rational judgment concerning the consequences of such a voluntary refusal of nourishment, he or she shall not be fed artificially. The decision as to the capacity of the prisoner to form such a judgment should be confirmed by at least one other independent physician."

We urge you to ensure that this matter receives prompt and thorough attention and to address any situation in which a physician may be asked to violate the ethical standards of his or her profession. The AMA remains committed to providing whatever assistance we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeremy A. Lazarus". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Jeremy A. Lazarus, MD

cc: Ardis D. Hoven, MD
Peter W. Carmel, MD
James L. Madara, MD