

From: THE RIVERSIDE CHURCH
490 Riverside Drive (between 120th & 122nd St.)
<http://www.theriversidechurchny.org>

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**FIRST TRUTH COMMISSION ON CONSCIENCE IN WAR TO BE
CONVENED AT THE HISTORIC RIVERSIDE CHURCH**

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Retired Army Chaplain, Combat Veterans and “Just War” Experts to Testify

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“The United States of America is founded on principals of political and religious freedom. When we punish the soldier who heeds his or her moral compass, our democracy is in grave danger.”

- Truth Commission Chair, Rev. Dr. Kaia Stern
Charles Hamilton Houston Institute, Harvard Law School

[**March 9, 2010, New York City**] – A diverse coalition of fifty religious, veterans, academic, and advocacy groups will hold a public hearing for the first **Truth Commission on Conscience in War** on March 21 at 4:00 p.m., at the same location where The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his historic “Beyond Vietnam” speech, [The Riverside Church](#). The public hearing will launch the Commission’s eight-month campaign to bring national attention to decisions of moral and religious conscience facing American service members. The campaign will culminate with the Veterans Day release of the Commission’s Final Report.

“Truth commissions lift up the often silenced and invisible voices of those directly affected by a conflict or issue,” explained **Rev. Dr. Gabriella Lettini**, Convener of Commissioners and Associate Professor of Theological Ethics at Starr King School for the Ministry. “Our goal in receiving testimony is to honor moral conscience in the military – and generate strategies to protect it that involve our broader communities.”

In his Nobel acceptance speech, President Obama argued that nations will at times “find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.” “We are asking,” said **Rev. Dr. Rita Nakashima Brock**, Project Director of the Truth Commission, “What happens when service members are asked to fight in a war they believe is *not* morally justified?”

In January, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki confirmed that young male veterans are committing suicide at an increasing rate – tragic losses that go uncounted as casualties for our current wars. At the same time, new VA research on “moral injury” highlights the lasting moral and psychological harm of violating one’s sense of right and wrong in war.

“War inflicts terrible, tragic consequences on all touched by it,” said Brock. “Moral conscience should not be one of its casualties.”

At the March 21 public hearing, commissioners and the general public will receive testimony from recent veterans, religious leaders and legal experts about issues of conscience facing service members in war. **Joshua Casteel**, who served as an Army interrogator at Abu Ghraib, and **Tyler**

Boudreau, who served as a Marine Captain in Iraq and authored the memoir *Packing Inferno*, will be among those who testify.

The recent veterans will be joined by **Rev. Herman Keizer, Jr.**, the Commission's Honorary Host. Keizer, a retired Army Chaplain (COL), Vietnam veteran, and former chair of the National Conference on Ministry to the Armed Forces, is an outspoken leader in a growing movement to recognize "selective conscientious objection," the right to object morally to a particular war. Current military regulations only recognize objections to "war in any form." In a recent letter to President Obama, Rev. Keizer argued: "The conscience of the selective objector deserves the same respect as the conscience of the pacifist."

The March 21st public hearing is free and open to the public. For details, the public can visit www.conscienceinwar.org.

Testifiers and expert witnesses include: **Jacob C. Diliberto**, US Marine veteran of Afghanistan and Iraq, Founder of Veterans for Rethinking Afghanistan, Fuller Theological Seminary; **Logan Mehl-Laituri**, Army veteran with service in OIF II, Co-founder of Centurion's Guild; **Camilo Mejia**, Army veteran and conscientious objector, author of *Road from Ar Ramadi*; **Dr. Jonathan Shay**, VA clinical psychiatrist, national PTSD expert, Macarthur Genius winner, and author of *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*; **Chris Hedges**, Pulitzer Prize winning former war correspondent for *The New York Times* and author of *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*; **Dr. Camillo "Mac" Bica**, Professor of Philosophy, School of Visual Arts, former Marine Corps Officer and Vietnam Veteran; **Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey**, Associate Vice President, Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Army veteran; **J. E. McNeil**, Executive Director, Center on Conscience & War; **Rabbi Douglas E. Krantz**, Congregation B'nai Yisrael and Executive Board Member of the Jewish Peace Fellowship; **Nurah-Rosalie P. Jeter Amat'ullah**, Executive Director, Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development, Graduate Certificate in Islamic Chaplaincy, Hartford Seminary; **Celeste Zappala**, Member of Gold Star Families Speak Out, Mother of Sgt Sherwood Baker, Pennsylvania National Guardsman, killed in Baghdad, April 26, 2004, while searching for weapons of mass destruction.

A list of commissioners and co-sponsors is available at www.conscienceinwar.org.

The Commission is being organized by **Faith Voices for the Common Good, Luna Productions, The Mission and Social Justice Commission of The Riverside Church, Starr King School for the Ministry, and Union Theological Seminary.**

About The Riverside Church

The Riverside Church (www.theriversidechurchny.org) is an interracial, interdenominational and international church built by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1927. The 2,400-member Riverside Church in Morningside Heights has a rich tradition of providing a forum for important civic and spiritual leaders. Past speakers include: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President William J. Clinton, the Dalai Lama, Fidel Castro, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela.

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Directions: To get to The Riverside Church by subway take the #1 train to 116th St. and walk to 91 Claremont Ave. (bet. 120th & 122nd St.) one block west of Broadway.