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November 2, 2011

Board of Trustees  
New-York Historical Society  
170 Central Park West  
New York, NY 10024

Dear Sirs and Madams:

We write to request that you withdraw the name of Henry Kissinger as an honoree of the New-York Historical Society at the event scheduled for November 7, 2011, at the Waldorf Astoria. Henry Kissinger is the United States' most notorious living war criminal, whose many crimes as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State from 1969-1977 include the following:

- Approval and direction of mass bombing campaigns targeted at civilians in both North and South Vietnam, and the mass civilian assassination campaign known as the Phoenix Program;
- The military invasion of Cambodia starting in 1969, including the approval and direction of mass bombing campaigns targeted at civilians, followed by the overthrow of the legitimate government of Cambodia and diplomatic support for the Khmer Rouge regime;
- Approval and direction of mass bombing campaigns in Laos, reducing areas like the Plain of Jars to veritable moonscapes;
- Approval and direction of the overthrow of the democratically-elected Chilean government of Salvador Allende in 1973, and unqualified support for brutal military dictatorships in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and other countries in Latin America;
- Unwavering diplomatic and intelligence support to the apartheid regime in South Africa, including the provision of military support to the apartheid government's military intervention in Angola—and then lying to the U.S. Congress about it;
- Collusion with the mass murder and rape campaign of the "East" Pakistan military in Bangladesh in 1971;
- Authorization of Indonesia's illegal invasion and occupation of East Timor in 1975, and the continued provision of U.S. military aid in violation of U.S. law, which enabled an occupation that killed up to a third of the population of the country.

This list could be lengthened considerably. Some observers might contend that Kissinger's efforts to defuse U.S. tensions with China or his emphasis on détente with the Soviet Union somehow redeem him, but this objection misses the point. A serial killer who occasionally donates to charity is still a serial killer. Kissinger remains one of the twentieth century's worst war criminals, and to pretend otherwise is to condone his crimes. It is difficult to understand how the New-York Historical Society could consider honoring such a man.

This action on the part of the Society makes a statement that these crimes are of no importance to us as 21st-century human beings. We raise Kissinger's crimes to your attention because as William Faulkner said, "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The failure to hold Kissinger to account for his myriad crimes has allowed him to continue dispensing recommendations for new wars and foreign interventions. The failure to confront this record has facilitated the invasion of Iraq, the use of torture at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, the policy of rendition and the detentions at Guantánamo Bay, and other

illegal actions of the “war on terror.”

As historians you are no doubt aware that Henry Kissinger is wanted for questioning in Britain, France, Spain, Chile and Argentina. Our culture is being poisoned by the failure to remember Kissinger’s and others’ crimes and to hold them to account. It is a terrible thing to participate in this process of enforced forgetting and impunity, and it also reflects very poorly on the United States in the international sphere.

Many other countries hold their criminal leaders accountable. It is time the United States did so as well. We protest this normalization of the worst kind of criminality and ask you to join us by rescinding this invitation.

Sincerely,

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