BRINGING HUMAN RIGHTS HOME

CHICAGO AND ILLINOIS: TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 3 million supporters, members and activists in more than 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.
In May of 1972, Anthony Holmes was interrogated by then Police Detective Jon Burge among others at Area 2 Police Headquarters. During his interrogation, Holmes' hands and legs were shackled while he was forced to sit in a chair. Burge then took the wires from his electric shock box, known by the detectives as the “nigger box” and wrapped the wires around both sets of shackles. Burge then proceeded to repeatedly shock Holmes with the box while suffocating him with a plastic bag, causing him to pass out from the pain. At one point, after Holmes had passed out and fell to the floor, he remembers gaining consciousness while being lifted up off the floor and thinking to himself that he was going to die. He then agreed to falsely confess to a murder he did not commit. The confession, the sole piece of incriminating evidence, was used against him to secure his conviction and subsequent incarceration for thirty years. He has not received any form of compensation.¹
The accusations are by no means unique. Amnesty International has investigated allegations that detectives in Area 2 and Area 3 police headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, systematically tortured more than 100 suspects between 1972 and 1991. Jon Burge was at the center of these allegations, either directly or through the chain of command. Initially a detective, he held a number of different ranks within Area 2 before becoming the Commander of the Area 2 Violent Crimes Section. Burge later became Commander of the Area 3 Detective Division. Several Area 2 colleagues followed him to Area 3, as did the allegations that they were regularly using torture and other ill-treatment to extract confessions from suspects. In addition to beatings, individuals alleged that they had been subjected to electric shocks, had plastic bags placed over their heads and had been threatened with mock executions. Forced confessions resulted in dozens of individuals being sentenced to long prison sentences or, in the case of eleven individuals, death sentences. All of the victims were of color, with the majority of them African American; the detectives were white. Sixteen victims have since been exonerated and released, according to the People's Law Office of Chicago, and there are at least 19 individuals who remain incarcerated and allege they were tortured into confessions. The State of Illinois Torture, Inquiry and Relief Commission, an agency set up in 2009 to review the cases of those who claimed to have been tortured by Commander Burge and his subordinates, is still reviewing as many as 71 cases where individuals claim torture by Burge, persons under his supervision at the time or involve officers who had previously been under the supervision of Jon Burge, but were not at the time of the alleged torture. No-one has been prosecuted or convicted for the crime of torture and the vast majority of those tortured have received no compensation for the extensive psychological injuries suffered.

International law strictly prohibits the use of torture and other ill-treatment, and stipulates that governments are responsible for investigating torture allegations, bringing criminal proceedings in torture cases and compensating the victims. The United States has ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Convention against Torture) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, two of the treaties which form the basis of this prohibition.
INVESTIGATIONS

Vincent Wade was convicted in 1984 of first-degree murder, home invasion and robbery and sentenced to life imprisonment. According to Wade, he was forced to confess after detectives smashed him on the nose with a flashlight, kneed and punched him in the groin, punched him in the eye and beat him on the chest with a baton and phonebook, while his arms and legs were pinned down. Wade remains incarcerated in Pontiac Correctional Center. Wade's case has been recommended for judicial review by the State of Illinois Torture, Inquiry and Relief Commission.6

International law requires that all suspected human rights violations be promptly, thoroughly and effectively investigated through independent and impartial bodies.7 However, decades after these acts took place, investigations into claims of coerced confessions elicited under torture by Burge or those he supervised in Chicago are still ongoing.

In 2009, the state of Illinois created the State of Illinois Torture, Inquiry and Relief Commission. The Commission began accepting claims in April 2011. As of March 2014, the Commission has publicly listed 16 cases in which it found credible claims of torture by Burge or his subordinates that were recommended for further judicial review. The Commission is currently reviewing as many as 71 cases where individuals claim torture by Burge, persons under his supervision at the time or involve officers who had previously been under the supervision of Jon Burge, but were not at the time of the alleged torture. Since its inception, the commission has battled funding and staffing issues, slowing its work. The deadline to make claims of torture is August 2014 and it is unclear what the timeframe will be for the commission’s work to be completed.

Tony Anderson was arrested on suspicion of auto theft in April 1990 and questioned by detectives at the Area 2 police headquarters. During questioning, one detective held a gun to Anderson’s head and threatened to blow his brains out while another detective jabbed him in the thighs and back with a nightstick until he cried and agreed to confess. Anderson eventually made an oral confession to numerous offenses committed in March and April 1990. He was indicted in 13 different cases, including murder and armed robbery. In May 2013, the Torture Inquiry and Relief Commission stated that there was sufficient evidence to conclude that Anderson’s claim of torture was credible and merited judicial review for appropriate relief.8

In October 2012, the Roderick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center at Northwestern University Law School and the People’s Law Office filed a Burge-related class action lawsuit. The suit was filed on behalf of over a dozen men seeking evidentiary hearings for remaining imprisoned despite their allegedly credible claims that they were tortured into confessing by Jon Burge or detectives under his command. Thirteen of the men named in the filing are currently incarcerated,9 but the attorneys in the case told the judge they suspect as many as 40 additional current inmates could become part of the class action. On March 12, 1014, the Chief Judge of the Criminal Division of Cook County denied the class action petition, but awarded all of the Burge victims who remain behind bars pro bono counsel to represent them in their post-conviction petitions. The Court also appointed a Special Master to work with attorneys from the People’s Law Office and MacArthur Justice Center to locate and notify any additional Burge victims who are incarcerated and notify them of their right to have pro bono counsel represent them in post-conviction proceedings challenging the validity of their convictions.10
ACCOUNTABILITY

“This is a dark chapter on the history of the city of Chicago, a stain on the city’s reputation...I am sorry this happened. Now let us now all move on.”

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, 11 September 2013.

Police Commander Jon Burge was eventually dismissed from the force in 1993; no criminal charges were brought against him, although the police department’s own investigative body, the Office of Professional Standards (OPS) had, by late 1990, already reported evidence of some 50 cases of torture and abuse under Burge and had found that this abuse was “systematic,” and “methodical.” Two other officers were disciplined, but never criminally charged.

After years of inaction by the authorities, torture survivors and their family members, along with community organizers and activists formed the Campaign to Prosecute Police Torture. They petitioned the Chief Judge of the Criminal Division of Cook County to appoint special prosecutors to investigate the crimes of torture committed by Burge and his detectives at Area 2 and 3 Police Headquarters from 1971-1991. Circuit Court Judge Paul P. Biebel, Jr. granted the petition and appointed two special prosecutors in 2002 who concluded their investigation in 2006. They confirmed that scores of suspects were tortured during their interrogations, including through suffocation and use of electric shocks. However the Special Prosecutors concluded that the statute of limitations prevented the prosecution of Burge or others under his command or supervision for the crime of torture.

In 2010, decades after the first reports of torture came to light, Burge was convicted of perjury and obstruction of justice for denying the torture he and others committed. He was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison. No Chicago police officer or city official has been convicted for any acts of torture, despite indisputable evidence that torture occurred.

Governments must ensure that those responsible for torture or other ill-treatment are brought to justice. This includes not only those who directly perpetrated the acts, but also those who encouraged, ordered or tolerated them. The Convention against Torture specifically requires that each state ensure that “all acts of torture,” any attempt to commit torture and any “act by any person which constitutes complicity or participation in torture” are offences under its criminal law. Presently, ‘torture’ in the United States is regulated by 18 U.S.C. § 2340-2340A (The Torture Act), which was enacted in 1994 to comply with the Convention against Torture. However, the Torture Act only criminalizes acts of torture when they are committed by citizens under the color of law outside the United States. The United States has failed to make torture a specific crime without a statute of limitations under its domestic law. Amnesty International believes that there should be no statutes of limitations for serious crimes under international law such as torture.
The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to restitution, compensation and rehabilitation for victims of gross violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms has stated that “statutes of limitations shall not apply for prosecuting violations of international human rights and humanitarian law norms that constitute crimes under international law.”

In May 2006, the United Nations Committee against Torture expressed concern at the impunity of law enforcement officials for the torture and ill-treatment carried out in Chicago, and found that the U.S. government should fulfill its obligation to “promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigate all allegations of acts of torture… and bring perpetrators to justice.” Neither Burge nor any of the detectives responsible for the torture of those including Stanley Wrice, Darrell Cannon, Alonzo Smith and Gregory Banks, have been adequately investigated, criminally prosecuted, or punished for those crimes.

**FEDERAL EFFORTS TO HOLD TORTURERS ACCOUNTABLE**

In July 2010, following Jon Burge’s conviction for perjury and obstruction of justice, a number of members of Chicago’s congressional delegation introduced legislation criminalizing acts of torture when committed by law enforcement officials in the United States and precluding a statute of limitations for the prosecution of such crimes. Representative Danny Davis was quoted as saying that Burge’s conviction on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice was “simply not enough,” and that charges of torture should never expire. Davis argued that if the bill been in effect at the time, Burge would have been found guilty of torture and not just perjury.

In the proposed bill, law enforcement officials (or others acting “under color of law”), convicted of committing, attempting or conspiring to commit torture would face a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison. If the torture led to death, the maximum term would be life. Representatives Bobby Rush and Jesse Jackson Jr. co-sponsored Davis’ bill with support from Senator Roland Burris of Illinois. The representatives introduced the Law Enforcement Torture Prevention Act (LETTPA) in the United States House of Representatives during the 2010, 2011 and 2012 sessions. However, it has never been passed or enacted.
COMPENSATION

Darrell Cannon was released in 2007, after spending 24 years in prison. After his arrest in November 1983, Chicago police officers had repeatedly pressed an electric cattle prod to his testicles. They allowed Cannon to believe they had loaded a shotgun, then rammed it into his mouth and pulled the trigger, repeating this mock execution three times. They tried to lift him off the ground by the handcuffs that secured his hands behind his back. At another location, they drove the cattle prod into his mouth. The police eventually forced a confession from Cannon, who was convicted of murder. While still in jail, in 1986, Cannon sought to vindicate his rights and challenge the tactics used against him, as well as seek compensation for the torture he had undergone prior to his conviction. Unaware that his case of torture was not an isolated instance, Cannon accepted the City of Chicago's offer of $3,000, of which he netted a total of $1,247. Cannon was exonerated and released in 2007, and filed a lawsuit against the City of Chicago for wrongful conviction. The City of Chicago, in response, successfully moved to dismiss his suit, arguing that Cannon's acceptance of the $3,000 settlement, prior to the substantial amount of torture evidence that was later revealed, prevented him from seeking any further compensation. He is currently appealing the dismissal of his suit seeking compensation for his wrongful conviction.

Darrell Cannon. He spent 24 years in prison as a result of a false confession elicited after being tortured by detectives working under the supervision of Jon Burge.

As of March 2014, there were two unresolved Burge-related lawsuits pending against the city of Chicago. Eighteen claims on behalf of the torture survivors have been resolved. The combined City of Chicago and Cook County costs for the Burge lawsuits is at least $95.5 million. The most recent settlement was for $12.3 million to Ronald Kitchen and Marvin Reeves, who spent 21 years in prison for multiple murders they did not commit, only to be released and exonerated in 2009.

Victims of torture or other ill-treatment and their dependents should be entitled to prompt reparation from the state, including restitution, fair and adequate financial compensation and appropriate medical care and rehabilitation. There are five types of reparation: financial compensation; medical care and rehabilitation; restitution (seeking to restore the victim to his or her previous situation); guarantees of non-repetition; and forms of satisfaction such as restoration of their dignity and reputation and a public acknowledgement of the harm they have suffered.
Other countries have established systems to help meet their obligation to provide reparation for past crimes. The Chilean government has invested about US$3.2 billion to the survivors and families of victims of the Pinochet regime. Argentina set aside roughly $3 billion in Argentinian pesos for former political detainees, the families of the disappeared, and survivors of unlawful detention during Argentina’s ‘Dirty War’ in the ‘70’s and ‘80’s. Although these systems have not gone without criticism, they demonstrate that governments have taken some steps towards making reparation for systematic human rights abuses. The City of Chicago must not abdicate its responsibility to provide reparations for torture committed by its officers. Accountability for torture must also be implemented at all levels of the United States government, whether local, state, or federal. The harm done must, as far as possible, be repaired. The consequences of torture on the individual survivor and their immediate family are both profound and long-lasting. Some survivors need long-term or intensive medical treatment or psychological counseling. It would be grossly unfair to make them or their dependents pay the price for the harm they have suffered.

ORDINANCE SEEKING REPARATIONS FOR THE CHICAGO POLICE TORTURE SURVIVORS

In January 2010, after 23 years in prison, Michael Tillman was cleared of the rape and murder charges that sent him to jail in 1986. According to Tillman, he confessed to these charges after being tortured for days by detectives working directly under Burge’s supervision at Area 2 Police Headquarters. Tillman stated that detectives put a bag over his head to suffocate him. He also alleged that they beat him bloody with a telephone book and took him to railroad tracks outside the police station where they put a gun to his head and threatened to kill him. After his exoneration, Tillman filed a federal civil rights suit against Burge, Mayor Richard Daley, the City of Chicago, Cook County and the Cook County State Attorney’s Office, and various other defendants. In July 2012, the Chicago City Council finance committee approved a $5.375 million settlement and the County approved a $600,000 settlement for Tillman.

The Chicago Torture Justice Memorial Project and the Peoples Law Office have called on the City of Chicago to create a $20 million fund to provide job training, health care, and other compensation benefits for survivors who, for varying reasons such as the statute of limitations, are unable to bring their cases to court to seek redress. On October 16th, 2013, Aldermen Proco Joe Moreno and Howard B. Brookins, Jr. filed an ordinance in the City Council that would allocate $20 million toward redress to torture victims and their families. The ordinance aims to create a commission to administer financial compensation to victims, as well as create a medical, psychological, and vocational center on the South Side of the city. Such services are not provided for survivors of domestic torture by the approximately 40 torture treatment centers currently operating within the United States. In addition to providing victims and their family members with free enrollment in City Colleges, the ordinance requires the city to fund public memorials for the cases and the struggle for justice, and Chicago Public Schools to teach a history lesson about the torture cases. A hearing on the anti-torture ordinance will be convened by the City Council in the spring of 2014.
CALL TO ACTION:

✓ The City Council of Chicago should pass the ordinance introduced by Aldermen Moreno and Brookins providing reparations for the Chicago Police Torture Survivors;

✓ City and state officials should fully investigate any allegation of torture or other ill-treatment committed by law enforcement officials, prosecute and bring to justice any individual against whom credible allegations of torture or other ill-treatment are made, and provide reparations to survivors and their families;

✓ Federal legislators in Illinois should support re-introduction, the United States Congress should pass, and the President should sign the Law Enforcement Torture Prevention Act, which would specifically criminalize acts of torture in the United States by law enforcement personnel and others acting under color of law, and removes the statute of limitations for such crimes.
ENDNOTES


2 Amnesty International, USA: Allegations of Police Torture in Chicago, Illinois, AMR 51/42/90, December 1990. The State of Illinois abolished the use of the death penalty in 2011 after issuing a moratorium in 2001. All sentences were commuted to life without parole. None of those sentenced to death in relation to the Burge scandal were executed. However Frank Bounds died in prison in 1998.


4 In response to a community driven movement seeking Burge to be held accountable for his crimes, as well as the U.N. Committee Against Torture calling on the U.S. government to bring the perpetrators to justice in the Chicago Police Torture cases, the U.S. District Attorney’s Office in the Northern District of Illinois in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Justice, indicted Burge for obstruction of justice and perjury for lies he told in a civil rights case. In 2010, Burge was convicted on all three counts.

5 The U.S. has sought to limit the application of international human rights law in its conduct by entering reservations to article 7 of the ICCPR and article 16 of the Convention against Torture as a condition of ratifying the treaties. The reservations state that the US considers itself bound by the articles only to the extent that “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” means the “cruel and unusual treatment or punishment” prohibited under the US Constitution. In its initial report to the Human Rights Committee on its obligations under the ICCPR, the US administration, then under President Bill Clinton, explained its reservations by stating that certain US practices had withstood judicial review in the US courts under constitutional provisions which were arguably narrower than the scope of Article 7. The United States has failed to make torture a specific crime without a statute of limitations under its domestic law. Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the United States to withdraw its reservations as defeating the object and purpose of the treaties in question and therefore incompatible with international law. The UN Human Rights Committee has also noted with concern the restrictive interpretation made by the US of its obligations under the Covenant, as has the Committee against Torture.


7 Human Rights Committee, General Comment no. 31 (2004), para. 15. See also General Comments no. 7 (1982) and 20 (1992). UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment, articles 12 and 13.

9 Amnesty International Interview with Joey Mogul, People’s Law Office, 28 February 2014.


12 After the Andrew Wilson case originally brought the police torture allegations to light, an OPS inquiry reviewed more than 50 other cases in 1990 and found that physical abuse at the Area 2 station was “systematic” and included “psychological techniques and planned torture” spanning at least a decade. According to attorneys, the report of this review (the Goldston Report) was initially suppressed but the OPS later said they would look again at cases individually. Through subsequent court proceedings, the People’s Law Office learned that the OPS had re-opened detailed investigations into only a few of the cases and that investigators had recommended disciplinary action in several of them, but these recommendations were overruled by the OPS director. Sharon Cohen, Pardoned Death Row Inmate Seeks Justice; Bitterness Lingers in Man Who Lost 17 Years of Life to Prison, Washington Post, December 7, 2003; Amnesty International, “Allegations of Police Torture in Chicago, Illinois,” December 1990.

13 In re Appointment of Special Prosecutor, No. 2001 Misc. 4, April 24, 2002; and see Report of the Special Prosecutor, July 19, 2006 and Supplement to the report of the Special Prosecutor, October 17, 2007.


16 UN Committee Against Torture, General Comment no. 31 para. 18.


18 UN Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment, Article 4.


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