

***Please note the comments at this hearing by War Criminals Watch adviser M. Cherif Bassiouni.***

By Joe Scarry

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Yesterday was a day of moving testimony before the Committee on Human Relations of the City Council of the City of Chicago on a [resolution to make Chicago a torture-free city](#) .

More than any other part of the day, I was moved by the assurance with which Alderman Joe Moore, the resolution's sponsor, stated, "I expect this resolution will pass UNANIMOUSLY." [PS

- [Chicago City Council voted UNANIMOUSLY on January 18, 2012, to make Chicago a torture-free city](#)  
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What might we be able to accomplish if we could hold the unanimous passage of this resolution up as an example to people in other cities, to encourage them to take similar action? Can we start [a movement for a torture-free WORLD?](#)

Below are additional notable excerpts from testimony at the hearing.

Attorney Flint Taylor set the stage at the pre-hearing press conference by holding up the edition of the Sun-Times that featured Rahm Emanuel's statement "TIME WE END IT!" One of the most significant parts of Taylor's testimony was his insistence that the City stop protecting torturers on the police force, and produce former Mayor Richard M. Daley for deposition.

Similarly, Alderman Joe Moore had opened the hearing with a stark statement: "WE are COMPLICIT if we stand by while torture happens."

DePaul law professor and UN war crimes investigator Cherif Bassiouni was explicit: torture is a crime

and we need to prosecute

it. He stressed "how important it is for citizens to raise their voices and be heard" about torture. And he expressed dismay that, while torture used to be something Americans blamed on other countries, it's now become institutionalized US practice. Echoing a theme touched on by

many witnesses, Bassiouni said that we can only hold on to our moral authority if we see and hear what is going on, and speak out to end torture. Answering a question from the chair about current U.S. practice, he said that the Obama administration has taken steps to eliminate the *open* commission of torture, to assure that U.S. "fingerprints" are not on acts of torture.

Activist Mario Vanegas, a torture survivor from Chile, explained the history of US export of torture via the School of the Americas (SOA), and gave moving testimony about his own experience. Urging Chicago City Council to pass the resolution, he said, "The entire world is watching!"

### CHICAGO TORTURE: EXCRUCIATING DESCRIPTIONS

During the hearing, Taylor showed video of Chicago police torture survivors Darrell Cannon and Anthony Holmes describing their experience. Cannon spent 24 years in prison for a crime he confessed to after torture by Chicago police. In the video, Cannon recounted, "They told me I was in for the hardest day of my life," and then he gave an excruciating description of a mock execution, such as when a shotgun was placed in his mouth, and he was tortured using an electric cattle prod applied to his testicles.

Taylor stressed that the John Burge police torture case has cost Chicago taxpayers \$53 million.

Anti-death penalty activist (and Chicago police torture survivor) Mark Clements asked, "How can #Chicago pass a resolution to renounce torture without addressing the issue of the twenty-three Burge torture victims still unfairly in prison?"

### SOLITARY = TORTURE

Activists who oppose Tamms supermax prison emphasize the need to end the use of solitary confinement and sensory deprivation, because of the way it destroys minds and bodies.

Activist Gregory Koger emphasized that thousands of people are subjected to torture in the form of extended solitary in the state of Illinois alone; the U.S. leads the world in the use of this practice. He exhorted Chicago to follow the courageous example of Pelican Bay hunger strikers to oppose imposition of torture through the use of extended solitary confinement.

Dr. Frank Somers of the Kovler Center stressed: "It's not 'solitary,' it's **sensory deprivation**, and the outcome is breakdown of the mind. This was a point that other witnesses testified to from their personal experience being subjected to solitary confinement.

### MORAL AUTHORITY? A "HUMANE" CITY?

Other testimony from a representative of the Kovler Center emphasized, "Torture is NOT committed to 'obtain information'! It is done to break bodies & minds - *to terrorize!*"

Prof. Adam Green of the University of Chicago, a key proponent of the Chicago Police Torture Memorial Project underlined the importance of taking a stand: "Burge was held up as a leader (!) We must loudly RENOUNCE this." He went on to say, "Can Chicago claim to be a humane city? NOT UNTIL we repair the legacy of using terror and isolation towards African-American

people by means of police torture."

Amnesty International Midwest Regional Director Debra Erenberg stressed how important it is to make the connection between ending torture in Chicago & issue of ending indefinite detention and closing Guantanamo, the subject of worldwide protests just one day prior to the hearings. She also emphasized that extended solitary confinement IS torture. Erenberg proposed that for the upcoming Chicago conference of Nobel Peace Prize winners, the city should be torture-free.

Explaining the need to put an end to torture, Congressman Danny Davis put it quite simply: "The Constitution demands it." Davis stated that an anti-torture bill he has sponsored together with other Illinois congressmen will go before Congress shortly. In his testimony, Davis emphasized that "there should be no statute of limitations to prosecuting torture."