

August 26, 2005

Executive Secretariat  
Inter-American Commission on Human Rights  
1889 F Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The organizations and individuals listed below write pursuant to Article 64 of the Rules of Procedure of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to request the Commission to schedule a general interest hearing during its October 2005 session on the subject of torture perpetrated against citizens of African descent with impunity by officers of the Chicago Police Department, in Chicago, Illinois, USA.

The purpose of the hearing is to inform the Commission concerning the continuing impunity for Chicago police officials who systematically tortured Chicago men of African descent during the 1970s through the early 1990s.

The torture of African American men at the Chicago police station known as Area 2 is well established. Judgments acknowledging the torture have been rendered in civil court cases and Chicago police investigators have admitted the systemic nature of the practice. Nonetheless, the perpetrators of the torture continue to have impunity. Despite repeated requests by aggrieved citizens and their counsel, the perpetrators of this torture have never been criminally charged or otherwise brought to justice. Moreover, victims of the torture continue to languish in prison as a result of confessions that were tortured from them. An ongoing, continuing conspiracy exists, on the part of the direct perpetrators in collusion with high officials in city and county government, to continue to cover up the fact and extent of the torture.

At the hearing, we will present evidence that, during the period from 1972 to 1991, primarily at a Chicago police station known as Area 2, a group of police officers under the command of former Chicago police Commander Jon Burge systematically committed brutal acts of torture against citizens of African descent who were in police custody. The torture included the administration of electric shocks (sometimes with cattle prods and sometimes with a generator housed in a black box) to the ears and/or to the exposed genitalia of the victims; conducting mock executions using unloaded revolvers and shotguns; suffocating victims with

plastic typewriter covers; and burning victims by holding them against hot radiators, among other techniques.

The hearing evidence will show that, to date, approximately 135 Chicago citizens of African descent have been identified as having been victimized by the police torture described above. Typically, confessions to serious crimes were extracted from the victims, who were then prosecuted and convicted based, in whole or in part, upon the tortured, involuntary confessions. Some of the victims were sentenced to death and spent years on the Illinois Death Row, until their sentences (and those of all of other Illinois Death Row inmates) were commuted in 2003 by former Illinois Governor George Ryan.<sup>1</sup> Many of the torture victims continue to languish in prison and to proclaim that they are innocent of any criminal wrongdoing.

The hearing evidence will further show that, early on, high ranking officials in the police department and in the local prosecutor's office (including then State's Attorney Richard M. Daley, now Mayor of the City of Chicago) were given concrete, credible information concerning the torture and that they failed to take any action. The evidence will show that the City of Chicago continues to expend large sums of money to defend the torturers and to support their denials that the torture ever took place.

Because of the significance and complexity of the issues, we request that a full hour be allocated for this hearing. Participants in the hearing will include torture victims, lawyers who have represented the torture victims and worked to expose this abuse, and others.

We are requesting that a representative of the United States be present at the hearing. We also respectfully suggest that the matters to be presented at the hearing may be of particular interest to the Commission's Special Rapporteur on the Rights of People of African-Descendants and Against Racial Discrimination and request that the Special Rapporteur also be in attendance.

Please direct any questions concerning this request to the attention of Locke E. Bowman, Legal Director of the MacArthur Justice Center, University of Chicago Law School, 1111 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Illinois

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<sup>1</sup> Governor Ryan pardoned four of the Burge torture victims, Aaron Patterson, Madison Hogley, Leroy Orange and Stanley Howard, on the ground of actual innocence.

Locke E. Bowman – MacArthur Justice Center at the University of Chicago Law School<sup>2</sup>

Campaign to End the Death Penalty

Sali Vicki Casanova – Chicago Conference of Black Lawyers

Chicago Chapter of the National Lawyers' Guild

Chicago Conference of Black Lawyers

Chicago Council of Lawyers

Christian Council on Urban Affairs

Citizens' Alert

Bernardine Dohrn – Midwest Coalition for Human Rights

Jeffrey Edison – National Conference of Black Lawyers – Michigan

Henry L. English – Black Fund of Illinois, Inc.

Susan R. Gzesh – Cooperating Attorney, Center for Constitutional Rights

Hands Off Assata Campaign/Chicago Coalition

Patricia Hill – African American Police League

William H. Hooks – Hooks Law Office

Paul L. Jakes, Jr. – President, Christian Council on Urban Affairs

The Jericho Movement for Recognition and Amnesty for U. S. Political Prisoners

Clifford P. Kelley – Radio Talk Show Host, WVON, Chicago

Lawrence E. Kennon – Cook County Bar Association

Maureen Loughnane – Midwest Coalition for Human Rights

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<sup>2</sup> Institutional affiliations of the individual signers are included for identification purposes only.

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MacArthur Justice Center at the University of Chicago Law School

Mandel Legal Aid Clinic of the University of Chicago Law School

Joseph Margulies – MacArthur Justice Center at the University of Chicago Law School

Lorenzo Martin – Standard Newspaper, Editor

Midwest Coalition for Human Rights

Salim Muwakkil – Senior Editor, *In These Times*

Florence Morgan – National Conference of Black Lawyers – New York

National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression – Chicago

National Conference of Black Lawyers – Illinois

Northwest Austin Council

Efia Nwangaza – The Jericho Movement for Recognition and Amnesty for U. S. Political Prisoners

R. Eugene Pincham – Retired Illinois Appellate Court Justice

Positive Anti-Crime Thrust

Mary Powers – Citizens Alert

Protestants for the Common Good

Coy Pugh – Executive Director, Northwest Austin Council

Howard Saffold – Positive Anti-Crime Thrust

South Side (Chicago) Branch of the NAACP

Students for Human Rights of the University of Chicago

Task Force for Black Political Empowerment

Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago

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Standish E. Willis – National Conference of Black Lawyers – Chicago

Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. – Pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ

Allean Morrow-Young

Illinois Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty