**RESOLUTION PROCLAIMING CHICAGO TO BE A TORTURE FREE ZONE**

Written comments of

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I am humbly submitting my written comments for the City Council hearing on the proposed resolution proclaiming Chicago to become a torture free zone. I am unable to be present in person due to international work in Rwanda. I have been involved with the Heartland Alliance Marjorie Kovler Center (Kovler) since its inception in 1987 as a community-based torture rehabilitation program. As a clinical psychologist, I have had the opportunity to work with many survivors who have made courageous efforts to heal from the emotional wounds of torture with the much needed support from a specialized program, such as the Kovler Center. I am going to “speak” from this reference point.

I have come to firmly believe that no matter where torture is committed – in interrogation rooms in a Chicago police station; in a prison in Iraq; or clandestine detention centers in Guatemala or Uganda – torture is wrong. Torture undermines the authority of official agents and results in a betrayal of authority to the victim, his or her family and their community. The consequences of torture do not stop with the cessation of the inflicted physical pain or the manipulative psychological strategies. The consequences of torture last a life time for the victim and permeate across generations. A Congolese torture survivor that I worked with once pulled up his pant legs to his knees and showed me scars from stakes that were hammered through his calves, and said to me, “Mary, these scars have healed.” He then placed his head in his hands and tearfully said, “But my mind, I do not think it will ever heal.”

The torture experience alters the survivor’s sense of self and identity and thus family relationships are also altered. To quote Sister Dianna Ortiz, an American nun tortured in Guatemala, who wrote in the chapter on “The Survivor’s Perspective” in *The Mental Health Consequences of Torture* (2001):

“Emerging from the situation in which we were tortured, survivors often feel, and are, misunderstood. People expect us to be who we were before the torture occurred. But an individual changes dramatically. The consequences of torture are multi-dimensional and interconnected; no part of the survivor’s life is untouched.”

Thus torture impacts the individual victim who then interacts within the systems of their family, community, and larger society. Families may suffer silently with communication being broken down by the altered personality of the survivor. Fear of being tortured again or of someone else being tortured can strangle any sense of freedom and integrity that a family may have enjoyed. The impact does not stop here, as the family exists in a community and just as the family system adjusts to the torture survivor, the community system also makes adjustments to the family. The community may be fearful and ostracize the family due to fear of association. Fear creates silence, so communities are silenced, demonstrating the proverb of the three wise monkeys who “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil,” a community that is unable to acknowledge what has happened to one of their members.

At a societal level, torture erodes our moral fiber. Toleration of or feigned ignorance of torture denies that torture is morally wrong and makes us culpable. This may not seem apparent to the general population, but with 25 years of serving torture survivors and their families, I can attest to not only to the prevalence of cruel and inhumane treatment that constitutes torture that is globally used, but to the years of suffering that follows – the unwitnessed years of nightmares, the unnoticed isolation, and depression.

This resolution provides us with an important opportunity to take a stand and acknowledge the use of torture exists in our city and occurs in epidemic proportion globally and to declare that the Mayor and the City Council of Chicago will stand firm against all forms of torture and inhuman treatment and will not tolerate impunity making Chicago a torture free zone.