

**CVT Event to commemorate  
UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture  
DAS Schriefer remarks**

I joined the State Department just 6 weeks ago, having spent my entire career working for the advancement of human rights in the civil society sector. 15 of those years were spent at Freedom House and over those years I had the great pleasure to get to know the Center for the Victims of Torture and its wonderful programs and staff.

So, it's truly a pleasure and an honor to be here tonight to participate in this important event in honor of International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

I first came into the world of human rights during an assistantship in graduate school just down the street at the George Washington University when I was tasked with going through boxes and boxes of old samizdat documents from the former Soviet Union and creating an archive of them.

Many of the documents were hand written and many contained descriptions of abuse and torture individuals had endured at the hands of the Soviet authorities, either for their political beliefs or their religious views or for their attempts to engage in traditional cultural or ethnic activities that were deemed anti-Soviet. In some cases the documents included photos of the abuses endured, either in detention facilities or in psychiatric hospitals.

Reading these documents and personal stories of abuse and torture transformed my life and led me away from any other potential career paths and into the world of human rights. I have never looked back.

The work done by the Center for the Victims of Torture is among the most important work that can be done in the field of human rights. CVT is unique in that, unlike many organizations that do the critical work of monitoring and documenting human rights abuses, CVT and its partner organizations provide direct care for those who have been tortured.

This care helps them overcome both the debilitating physical and psychological wounds that they have endured to help them return to a life without constant fear, repression, and pain. CVT refers to it as “Restoring the Dignity of the Human Spirit.” I think that description is absolutely accurate.

For those of us here who have never had to confront the possibility of being tortured, which I sincerely hope is the majority, we should take a moment to think about what the term torture really means. I say this because I believe there are so many words that we hear and use so very often in the human rights world that they become sanitized and we can lose track of the ugly and horrific acts that they represent.

Torture often involves acts of such cruelty, brutality, and degradation that its victims endure chronic physical and mental symptoms such as hearing loss, blindness, debilitating headaches and neurological damage, depression, sexual dysfunction, and respiratory issues. It’s difficult to do and perhaps not the typical request at a reception on Capitol Hill, but I ask you all to take a moment to think about what is done to a human being to result in these kinds of ailments.

What it means to go for weeks, months, or years of beatings, of rapes. Being forced to feel physical discomfort 24 hours a day, whether from cold, heat, hunger or lack of sleep. Being forced to live and sleep in your own waste. All of these horrendous acts have been done and are being done to human beings in far too many parts of the world.

Now ask yourself what it takes to help these human beings come back from this darkness to a life with meaning and hope. To a life where they can once again be a part of a community, where they can work, sleep, be a wife or a husband or a father or a mother. CVT’s torture treatment centers that employ methods from pioneering research in survivor rehabilitation are truly lifelines to torture survivors around the world.

But CVT does more than this. CVT both trains and advocates partner organizations to help torture survivors in communities around the globe and they go in early to post-conflict settings to be there for people who otherwise would

have little hope. CVT also provides a voice for those people ---its advocacy work to end torture has been critical in the campaign against counterterrorism methods that include the use of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against prisoners and suspected terrorists.

Its work in reaching out to senior leaders in the military, intelligence, national security and policy sectors has been instrumental in framing our own national debate.

I am proud to work for an administration that has not only spoken forcefully against the use of torture in any form, but that has made that a policy in all agencies and departments of the United States government at home and abroad. Our administration has also continued critical funding to organizations like CVT and to funds like the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

As the White House stated on Tuesday in honor of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture:

*Torture is abhorrent: we do not practice it, and we will not countenance it or transfer individuals to any country where they will be subjected to it.*

*In keeping with our laws, principles, and the Convention Against Torture, the United States continues to work with our international partners to end torture. With the development and enforcement of strong domestic laws, effective training of law enforcement and military personnel, and systematic review of interrogation, detention, and transfer practices, together we can turn over to our children a world in which no justification for torture is accepted. We will also continue to support efforts like the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.*

In my farewell speech at Freedom House, I said that my new position at the State Department was merely a new platform from which I would continue my work to promote and protect human rights and I can assure you all that after 6 weeks on the job this is absolutely true.

And I can also assure you that CVT and other civil society organizations will continue to be viewed as essential partners in our ongoing mission to achieve the universal respect for human rights, including an end to torture.

I would like to thank our hosts, Dr. Morad El-Shazly, Curt Goering, Jeanne Herrick-Stare and the other remarkable staff of CVT for including me in this wonderful event, and to express my appreciation to Congressman Ellison for hosting us and for lending his important voice to the campaign to end torture.