

Abolish the death penalty and torture

by Kourosh Mohseni

Amnesty International's third main focus is to abolish the death penalty, torture and cruel treatment of prisoners. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights article five indicates that; "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." Torture is a fundamental violation of human rights condemned by the General Assembly of the United Nations as an offence to human rights dignity and prohibited under national and international law.

Torture. The remarkable thing about it is not how evil it is, though it is outlawed internationally and under the constitutions of more than 100 nations. It is not how horrifying it is, though anything more horrible than the deliberate burning, breaking and treating of human flesh and bone can not be imagined. The truly remarkable thing about torture is how widespread it is.

Torture, that ancient rite more commonly associated with the Middle Ages, is a 20th century epidemic.

Torture in the modern world still performs its traditional function. To obtain information and extract "confessions". But its main purpose is intimidation-both of the prisoner being tortured and society as a whole. It is a method by which insecure, illegitimate regimes seek to maintain power. "The purpose of torture is not only the extortion of confessions, of betrayal: the victim must disgrace himself, by his screams and his submissions, like a human animal. In the eyes of everybody and in his own eyes. He or she who yields under torture is not only to be made to talk, but is also to be marked as subhuman."

(Jean-Paul Sartre)

Torture is the deliberate infliction of pain on a human being by a public authority for a public purpose. It is this official component that distinguishes it from other situations in which one human being inflicts pain on another. It is also what gives torture its singularly evil aspect. The proper role of government is to serve people; the deliberate infliction of pain by the state on its citizens is the most gross perversion of the social order imaginable. Moreover, the pain is not merely physical. For torture to achieve its purpose of utter

intimidation, it must not only hurt the body, it must devastate the spirit. It must crush the human soul.

In 1974, the military regime that had ruled Greece for seven years was replaced by a democratically elected government. Within months, the new government brought to trial the men who had served in the torture chambers of the colonels; among the accused was one Alexander Lavarons. "We are a poor but decent family," his father told the court, "and now I see him in the dock as a torturer. I want to ask the court to examine how a boy whom everyone said was a diamond became a torturer." Mr. Lavarons said, "I feel the need to tell this respected tribunal that I am a human being like you, like your neighbor's, like a friend."

Was Alexander Lavarons really "a human being like you, like your neighbor's son, like a friend?" The answer of course a disturbing one is that he quite probably was. While torture as a profession undoubtedly attracts more than its share of sadists, not all torturers have an innate desire to inflict pain on others. The evidence from Greece, Argentina and other countries that have investigated their tortured, torturing pasts indicates that in the main torturers are made not born. Nor is it particularly difficult to create a torturer. For the most part torturers are trained according to the same basic principle as ordinary military recruits: The destruction of personal values and their replacement with blind obedience to authority, though in the case of torturers there are usually rewards, such as membership in an "elite" corps, balanced by the threats for refusing to torture. (In case of Islamic Republic of Iran torturers are promised to be blessed by Allah and a special place is reserved for them in heaven. Torturing is Allah's word and is encouraged against pagans whom the regime call any one who stands up for their rights.)

The extent to which the exercise of authority can induce human beings to inflict pain on one another was explored by Stanley Milgram, a psychologist at Yale University, in a 1961 experiment. Dr. Milgram recruited 40 volunteers, who were asked to assume the role of teacher and to administer a punishment was an electric shock and the severity of the shocks increased with each wrong answer. The students,

who were seated in another room, and audible, though not visible to the volunteers, were not, receiving electric shocks though the volunteers were under the impression that they were administering shocks of increasing severity as the experiment progressed. The volunteers were told the experiment was intended to investigate the role of punishment as an aid to learning. Its real purpose was to find out just how far the volunteers would go in punishing their victims. At the 300 volts level, the student cried out in pain. When the volunteers turned to the experimenter for guidance, they were told, quietly but firmly, to carry on. Only five refused to do so! Contrary to all expectation, 26 of the volunteers completed the series, finally administering what they believed was a 500 volts charge to the now silent victims. "I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident," an observer related. "Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his earlobe and twisted his hands. At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and continued. "Oh God, let's stop it." And yet he continued to obey word of the experimenter and obeyed to the end."

Milgram's volunteers were ordinary people in the street, free to quit the experiment at any time; yet they were willing to put themselves and others through extreme stress before challenging authority. The training of torturers indeed, of all professionals reinforces this innate deference to authority found in most individuals.

Amnesty International calls on all governments to implement the following 12-points Program for the prevention of torture. It invites concerned individuals and organizations to join in promoting the program. Amnesty International believes that the implementation of these measures is a positive indication of government's commitment to abolish torture and to work for its abolition worldwide:

1-The official condemnation of torture.

The highest authorities of every country should demonstrate their total opposition to torture.

2-Limits on Incommunicado Detention

Torture often takes place while the victims are held incommunicado-unable to contact people outside who would help them or find out what is happening to them. Governments should adopt safeguards to ensure that incommunicado detentions does not become an opportunity for torture.

3-No Secret Detention

In some countries torture takes place in secret centres. Governments should ensure that prisoners are held in publicly recognized places.

4-Safeguards During Interrogation and Custody

5-Independent Investigation of Reports on Torture

6-No use of Statement Extracted Under Torture

Governments should ensure that confessions or other evidence obtained through torture may never be invoked in legal proceedings.

7-Prohibition of Torture in Law

Governments should ensure that acts of torture are punishable offences under the criminal law.

8-Prosecution of Alleged Torturers

9-Training Procedures

It should be made clear during the training of all officials involved in the custody, interrogation or treatment of prisoners that torture is a criminal act.

10-Compensation and Rehabilitation

11-International Response

Governments should use all available channels to intercede with governments accused of torture.

12-Ratification of International Instruments

All governments should ratify international instruments containing safeguards and remedies against torture.

Native languages

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TV. For an infant, English is picked up subconsciously (most of the time), so it is always in their minds.

Another distraction is the radio. The radio has the same type of effects as TV. On TV, you have cartoons that many young children love to watch. On the radio, there are many "catchy" songs that constantly cling to our minds. But these two distractions can also be used as a useful tool to keep the language alive.

A Mohawk-spoken radio station now exists. There are other radio stations in Montreal that have one-hour Mohawk-spoken shows. The idea of establishing a Mohawk TV station has been thought of. The downfall to establishing a TV station is that it is difficult to support because it is so expensive. The bright side is that they have not used this economic reason as a discouragement. They are using it as a goal.

Another way to revive the language is through songs. Songs are one of the easiest ways to pick up a language. It is also fun to learn and sing a song. When teaching Mohawk children to learn their language, traditional songs are always used. Not only do these songs help in learning the lan-

guage, it also helps children learn about their traditions and their history - which are also essential to the Mohawk Culture, (and any Native Culture).

Another method that helped to revive the language was to give every Mohawk a Mohawk-given name. Every Mohawk-given name has meaning in the language and culture. This makes the process of learning and reviving helpful and fun. In school, the children are called by their Mohawk names. This process is very helpful, because children know each other by their Mohawk names, even on the streets.

Mr. TwoRivers also talked about the Mohawk traditional marriage ceremonies. Through political effort, they are sort of being recognized. The problem is that in order for the government to recognize these marriages, they need to know specifically the dates, the births, the deaths, etc... For legal purposes, the only way these marriages will be recognized is if a priest or a judge is present. There are many other problems faced with traditional marriages.

One such problem is social security. The Children will not have social security if they are born in another country - such as the US,

because other countries will not recognize the traditional marriages to be legitimate. But efforts to get traditional marriages recognized are paying off. Many Mohawk couples are being married traditionally, also, these marriages are adding to the awareness among the members of Mohawk Communities - especially the children.

Other aspects in Mohawk Communities that are unique are with elders. In many Native Nations/Cultures, elders are looked at as being people who are older and wiser. In Mohawk Communities, the elder is the oldest person to the people they are dealing with. The elder has a responsibility of teaching the younger. In Mohawk, the elder can be of any age. For example, a person who is 19 is an elder to a person who is 16. But a person who is 23 is an elder to the person who is 19.

In conclusion, I thought that Mr. TwoRivers had a lot of wisdom that would be useful for the whole world. But more importantly, I found that there is a sense of community within the Mohawk Nation; that Mohawks are proud to be Mohawk and proud to be Native. For 500 years, Europeans have attempted to assimilate us (Natives) into their cultures. It feels good to know that the pride that Native Canadians have for themselves and for their cultures are alive and well today and the future looks brighter. He also convinced me to say, *again, I'm proud to be a Maliseet and I'm proud to be a Native.* Mr. TwoRivers, if you have the chance to read this article, I would like to thank you.

A friend of mine, who also had the chance and the opportunity to listen and talk with Mr. TwoRivers, expressed his feelings and thoughts in a poem. Although he wanted to remain anonymous, I would like to thank him for letting me share this poem with you.

Deep set eyes that attracts a soul/ Brown smoldering metamorphosis/ At each glance within/ One finds burrows marking time/ But unlimited space is found/ In its pathways.

You are indeed two rivers/ One from which I follow/ Paddling ever so pervasively

Emancipation from you/ On a silent wave of joy and peace/ The softness of the tide/ In the stillness of the moon/ Rising again with the sun/ Creating the smoke of the fire/ The Sublime

To Chief TwoRivers of the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake. He is the peace of the heart.

If anyone has any questions about the Native Student Council, drop by room 31. If there is nobody there, leave a message in our mail box at St. Thomas SU or write us a personal.

WIN

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