



## SHINING A LIGHT ON TORTURE

Torture happens throughout the world and most countries want it to stop. It is illegal, but that doesn't prevent it from occurring.

Because jails, prisons, mental health facilities, immigration detention centers, youth detention facilities, police stations, and other places of detention are often not overseen by independent monitors, torture and abuse can occur.

The United States has the same challenge. A Chicago Police Commander tortured people for decades; torture and abuse occurs in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay supermax prison in California and similar prisons in other states; and rape, sexual and other abuse occur in U.S. immigration detention centers.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture was created to help nations ensure that torture will not take place in their detention facilities. The United States, which has not yet ratified OPCAT, can learn from the experiences of the 64 nations that have ratified it, including Great Britain, Sweden and Tunisia. OPCAT sets up oversight bodies and other national mechanisms that **prevent** torture and abuse in any place of confinement.

It is time for the U.S. to make use of this treaty to shine a light on places of detention and thereby help to prevent torture. The first step is for the President to sign the treaty.

Synagogues can play an important role in encouraging the president to sign. Human Rights Shabbat, organized by Rabbis for Human Rights North America, provides an opportunity for Jews to urge the President to sign OPCAT. Worship materials have been created to help synagogues commemorate Human Rights Day.

The National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) has produced a video, *Preventing Torture Everywhere*, describing why many people of faith support OPCAT. View it at [http://www.nrcat.org/opcat\\_video](http://www.nrcat.org/opcat_video) and arrange for a showing of the film in your synagogue.

Human Rights Day weekend, December 7-9, 2012, provides an opportunity to shine a light on places where torture might occur in the U.S. You can use worship materials, show a video, or gather signatures for the petition asking the President to sign the OPCAT. You can go to [www.nrcat.org/human\\_rights\\_day](http://www.nrcat.org/human_rights_day) for resources for this special weekend.

**Collect signatures to a NRCAT statement asking the President to sign OPCAT:** On November 27, 2012, senior religious leaders will have a meeting in the White House to ask the President to sign OPCAT. It would help make the case if we had the names of 5,000 people of faith who had signed the NRCAT statement. We currently have 3,500 names. Go to [www.nrcat.org/opcat](http://www.nrcat.org/opcat) to download a petition version of the statement and take it to gatherings at your synagogue. You can also sign it online at [www.nrcat.org/opcat\\_statement](http://www.nrcat.org/opcat_statement)

People of faith are called to speak for those who have no voice, including the imprisoned.

## TALKING POINTS FOR PRESENTING THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL TO THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE

- Every nation has the challenge of preventing torture from happening in their places of confinement like: jails, prisons, mental health facilities, immigration detention centers, youth detention facilities, police stations, detention facilities like Guantanamo and other places of confinement. Torture happens throughout the world and most countries want it to stop. It is illegal in most countries, but that doesn't prevent it from occurring.
- The U.S. also has that challenge. A Chicago Police Commander tortured people for decades; torture and abuse occurs in solitary confinement in Pelican Bay supermax prison in California and similar prisons in other states; and rape, sexual and other abuse occur in U.S. immigration detention centers. There is no domestic or international authority charged with overseeing detention facilities, which means these abuses can, and most likely will continue. Torture needs secrecy to take root and grow.
- These practices constitute torture or inhuman and degrading treatment under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Convention Against Torture). These practices are also a violation of U.S. law, and they are contrary to the moral and ethical teachings of every religious tradition. Genesis states that all human beings are created in the image of God and therefore have been endowed with dignity and worth.
- The Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) does help. OPCAT contains two provisions that will help prevent torture from occurring in U.S. detention facilities. First, OPCAT requires each ratifying country to establish National Preventative Mechanisms (NPMs) to continually monitor the treatment of prisoners and other detainees. Second, OPCAT allows for international oversight of places of confinement to ensure that torture and other abuses are not occurring. Consistent independent monitoring of detention sites – whether the sites are for criminals, administrative detainees, or those captured in armed conflict – has been found to be one of the most effective ways to deter torture and cruel treatment. There are 64 nations that have ratified OPCAT.
- OPCAT is based to a large extent on the experience of other independent monitors, including the International Committee of the Red Cross and the European Committee to Prevent Torture, both of which have made a significant contribution toward protecting individuals from torture. The European monitoring system has been in place for 20 years and covers 47 countries.
- In 2002, the U.S. was one of only four countries to vote against OPCAT in the UN General Assembly. Since its passage, the U.S. has neither signed nor ratified OPCAT. Ratification of treaties first requires the president to sign it and then the U.S. Senate ratifies. It takes 67 votes in the Senate for the ratification of a treaty. However, the first step is to urge the President to sign OPCAT.