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FORMER CHICAGO POLICE COMMANDER JON BURGE ARRESTED ON CHARGES RELATING TO TORTURE OF OVER 100 AFRICAN AMERICANS

Federal Government heeds call of U.N. Committee Against Torture to investigate and prosecute Chicago Police Torture cases

Tuesday, October 21, 2008 (CHICAGO) -- Victims, attorneys and activists who have been calling for justice in the now infamous Chicago Police Torture cases for decades claimed victory today when former Chicago Police Commander Jon Burge was finally indicted by the U.S. Attorney General's Office and arrested on charges relating to the torture of over 100 African American men over a 20 year period.

Until today, despite mountains of evidence, countless internal and external investigations, and repeated judicial findings that Burge and officers under his command "systematically" and "methodically" tortured African Americans at Chicago police headquarters, not a single officer or official involved has been prosecuted for their crimes and violations of their victims' Constitutional and human rights. The torture, committed to elicit false confessions, included electric shocks to genitals, anal rape with a cattle prod, suffocation with plastic bags, and physical beatings, along with sleep deprivation and denial of food, water and bathroom facilities. The victims were not only subjected to grueling physical pain but were also tormented with racist epithets and slurs throughout their interrogations: they were called "nigger;" threatened with the electric shock box described by the detectives as the "nigger box"; and threatened with hanging "like they had other niggers," an obvious reference to lynching. Often the officers involved would taunt the victims by stating "who are people going to believe, a 'nigger' like you or a cop like me."

Frustrated by the lack of prosecutions and absence of systemic remedies for the victims of Burge's torture, activists and attorneys took the cases to the world stage. In May of 2006, following hearings concerning the U.S. government's compliance with the Convention Against Torture, the U.N. Committee that monitors the Convention called on the U.S. government to "promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigate all allegations" of abuse by law enforcement officials and specifically noted "the limited investigation and lack of prosecution in respect of the allegations of torture perpetrated in areas 2 and 3 of the Chicago Police Department" as evidence of the U.S. government's failure to uphold the human rights guaranteed by the Convention. Also in 2006, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture questioned the U.S. government's handling of the cases and the continued imprisonment of 24 victims based on confessions elicited through torture.

"We are heartened that the federal government has heeded the call of the U.N. to step in and prosecute where local and state officials have failed to do so," said Joey Mogul, an attorney at the People's Law Office who presented the Burge cases to the U.N. Committee Against Torture. *"We are gratified that Jon Burge will finally be brought to justice for his heinous violations of human rights. However, justice will not be entirely done until the officers under Burge's command who participated in the torture and its cover-up are prosecuted and convicted, new hearings are called for the guys still behind bars based on confessions elicited through torture in violation of Article 15 of the UN Convention Against Torture, and financial reparations are paid to Burge's victims as required by Article 14 of the Convention."*

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