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Report of the Conference Committee
GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON THE FEASIBILITY OF A
MINNESOTA CENTER FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

Summary

The Committee recommends that a conference/training session be held in Minnesota several months before the opening of the proposed Center for Torture Victims. A one day conference would give national and international visibility to the Center as a place for the treatment of torture victims, for research, and for education about torture. Immediately after (or possibly before) the publicly visible conference, the Center would hold a training session of two days for prospective staff, volunteers, and others who wish to learn about the medical and legal tasks which the Center will be undertaking.

The Conference

The one day conference would be open to the public and would include a keynote address by the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture. There would be four panel discussions or presentations by: (1) victims of torture, (2) those who have been involved in the medical treatment of torture victims, (3) those who have worked to prevent torture, and (4) those who have studied the phenomenon of torture, possibly including a former torturer.

(1) The victims would be selected so as to demonstrate the worldwide scope of the problem in such countries as Argentina (under the previous government), Iran, South Africa, and the Soviet Union.

(2) Representatives of the torture treatment centers in Copenhagen, Toronto, and South America would be invited to speak about their work and the progress they have made in helping victims.

(3) Representatives of Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the U.N. Trust Fund for Torture Victims, and other organizations would be invited to discuss the techniques they use to prevent or work against torture throughout the world.

(4) The last panel of the conference would focus upon the torturer and the sorts of training which might be provided to military, police, and others, so as to make it less likely that torture will occur.

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The Training Session

The Center would invite to the training session as participants/observers those doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, refugee resettlement personnel, representatives of social service organizations, immigration lawyers, social workers, physiotherapists, clergy, translators, and others who may be working in the Center, volunteering their services to the Center, who may be referring potential clients to the Center, or who will otherwise be cooperating with the Center.

The training session would include presentations on such topics as the diagnosis of the physical and psychological consequences of torture, medical treatment, psychological counseling, dental care, physiotherapy, follow-up assessment to determine whether treatment had long-term beneficial results, the special problems of certain categories of torture victims and their families (women, children, teenagers, etc.), the social needs of torture victims and their families, and the legal problems of torture victims. The training session might also include a discussion among those who have had engaged in the treatment of the victims of rape, child abuse, spousal abuse, concentration camps, prisoner of war camps, and similar experiences to learn whether they have developed treatment modes which might be useful for torture victims and to assess the degree of commonality or difference among these sorts of traumatic stress situations.

Timing

If the Center is to open for the care of patients in late Spring 1986, the best time for the conference/training session would be early Spring, for example, early in April 1986. In order to assure the success of the conference/training session, resource people should be invited by October 1985.

Costs

An international conference/training session of three days would cost about \$200,000 assuming that about 25 guests would be invited from abroad and 25 would be invited from within the United States. The remaining participants would pay their own way or come from the local area.

A much more modest training session with 4 international guests and 10 national travelers could be arranged for about \$15,000.

Organizer

Ideally, the initial staff of the Center should organize the conference, but the Center will probably not have funding or staff until early in 1986, which would be too late to begin planning for the conference.

In May 1985 the Amnesty International USA staff will begin planning their program for 1986 and the conference/training session could be proposed at that time with the hope that Amnesty International staff in Chicago and New York could help take the initial steps towards organizing the conference/training session and could help identify some of the funds which might be used for the event. At least half of the funds would probably need to be raised locally in order for AIUSA to consider taking over the organization of the conference. Obviously, further discussions with AIUSA staff would be needed before any commitments could be undertaken.

A third alternative would be to find some local organization which might be interested in organizing the conference, including the American Lutheran Church, the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee, etc. More discussion will be required in order for this alternative to be seriously considered.