NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

TORTURE: PRACTICE, PREVALENCE, TREATMENT, AND PREVENTION

A Symposium Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the
U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

SUNDAY, APRIL 26, 1998
10:30 A.M. - 12:00 NOON

AUDITORIUM
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES BUILDING
2101 CONSTITUTION AVENUE, WASHINGTON, DC
10:30  The Practice of Torture: an Overview  
Torsten N. Wiesel, Chair, Committee on Human Rights of the NAS, NAE, and IOM; President, Rockefeller University

10:45  “Torture,” Medical Science, and Human Rights: A Problem with Paradigms?  
Derek Summerfield, Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, London

11:00  Caring for Survivors of Torture: Treatment and Asylum in the United States  
Allen S. Keller, Director, Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture

11:15  Prison Health Care and Human Rights in the United States and Cambodia  
Steven S. Spencer, independent consultant in prison health care, Santa Fe, New Mexico

11:30  Comments and Questions

11:55  Closing  
Torsten N. Wiesel
SPEAKERS

Allen S. Keller

Allen Keller, M.D., is an Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine at New York University School of Medicine, and Director of the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture, a program that provides multi-disciplinary care to torture victims and their families. More than 200 survivors of torture from 40 countries have received services through this program since it began in 1995. Dr. Keller is on the international advisory board of Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and has written and spoken about a number of issues relating to health and human rights including access to health care for prisoners, the effects of land mines, caring for survivors of torture, and preserving political asylum. In 1992-93 Dr. Keller lived in Cambodia where he helped to develop a program to teach human rights to Cambodian health professionals. In 1996 Dr. Keller led a PHR fact-finding mission to Dharamsala, India to assess the problem of torture in Tibet among Tibetan refugees now living in India.

Steven S. Spencer

Steven S. Spencer, M.D., F.A.C.P., is now an independent consultant in correctional health care, following eight years as medical director of the New Mexico Corrections Department. He has served as a consultant to US prisons and jails, the US Department of Justice, the National Institute of Corrections, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, federal courts, and an expert witness in litigation cases. In 1994 he spent three weeks evaluating health care and conditions in Cambodian prisons as a consultant to a consortium of Physicians for Human Rights, the American Refugee Committee, the United Nations Center for Human Rights in Cambodia, and the Royal Government of Cambodia. His experience also includes six months of heart disease research at Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Gabon in 1960, the practice of internal medicine in Flagstaff, Arizona and on the Navajo Reservation, and full-time medical faculty positions.

Derek Summerfield

Derek Summerfield, M.D., is a long-standing human rights advocate. He has had firsthand experience of war zones in his native Zimbabwe, as well as Nicaragua, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. Since 1991 Dr. Summerfield has been a full time psychiatrist at the Medical Foundation Center for Victims of Torture. He is also a consultant to Oxfam; a research associate at the Refugee Studies Programme, Oxford University; and honorary senior lecturer in community psychiatry at St. George's Hospital Medical School in London. Dr. Summerfield publishes regularly in the British Medical Journal, The Lancet, and elsewhere.

Torsten N. Wiesel

Torsten Wiesel, M.D., a neurobiologist, has been president of Rockefeller University in New York City since 1992. He is chair of the Committee on Human Rights of the NAS, NAE, and IOM; a member of the Executive Committee of the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies; and chair of Human Rights Watch/Arms Project. In 1981, Dr. Wiesel and Dr. David H. Hubel of the Harvard Medical School shared the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for their studies of the development and function of the mammalian visual systems. Other awards include the Dr. Jules C. Stein Award presented by the Trustees for Research to Prevent Blindness, the Karl Spencer Lashley Prize of the American Philosophical Society, the LeDige Prize from Harvard University, and Columbia University's Louisa Gross Horwitz Prize. Dr. Wiesel is a member of the US National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the Royal Society, and the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. He serves on the Harvard Board of Overseers.
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
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INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The Committee on Human Rights was created in 1976 in response to concern by members of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) about widespread abuses of human rights, particularly those of their scientific colleagues. In 1994, the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) joined the NAS as full sponsors of the committee. The committee is composed of 16 members who are drawn from the membership of the three institutions. The committee has the active support of more than 1,700 members of the NAS, NAE, and IOM, who assist it as “correspondents” in its human rights work by writing appeals in behalf of and letters of encouragement to imprisoned colleagues. The committee is financially supported by the NAS, NAE, and IOM, several private foundations, and contributions from private donors.

The work of the committee is grounded in principles set forth in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The committee does not support or oppose any government or political system; it does hold governments responsible for conforming to international standards for the protection of human rights and accountable when they do not.

The committee uses the influence and prestige of the institutions it represents in behalf of scientists, engineers, and health professionals anywhere in the world who are unjustly detained or imprisoned for exercising their basic human rights as promulgated by the UN Declaration. Each case is carefully investigated, using a variety of sources before being taken up by the committee. Such individuals cannot have been known to use or advocate violence. The committee also intervenes in behalf of non-violent colleagues who are the recipients of death threats, and it works to promote just prosecution in cases of individuals who have been killed for political reasons.

Activities of the committee include private inquiries, appeals to governments, moral support to prisoners and their families, and consciousness-raising efforts such as workshops and symposia. Periodically, it undertakes a mission of inquiry to a country. It issues public statements regarding a case or reports on the human rights situation in a country only when significant private efforts have proved unsuccessful and after the NAS Council and the presidents of the NAE and IOM have approved such action by the committee. The committee also is a catalyst for human rights issues of concern to the members of the academy complex.

The committee serves as the secretariat for the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies. The Network, created in 1993, works to address grave issues of science and human rights, particularly the unjust detention or imprisonment of colleagues, throughout the world. Currently, science academies and scholarly societies in 28 countries are participants in the Network; each is represented by internationally prominent members who are also human rights advocates. The members of the Network’s Executive Committee are: Francois Jacob, France; Max Perutz, United Kingdom; Pieter van Dijk, the Netherlands; Edoardo Vesentini, Italy; and Torsten Wiesel, the United States of America.
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS

1998

Torsten Wiesel, Chair, Office of the President, Rockefeller University, New York, NY

Mary Ellen Avery, Department of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School, Boston, MA

Baruch Blumberg, Fox Chase Cancer Center, Philadelphia, PA

George Bugliarello, Office of the Chancellor, Polytechnic University, Brooklyn, NY

Mildred Dresselhaus, Department of Electrical Engineering, Massachusetts Institute Technology, Cambridge, MA

Felton Earls, Harvard School of Public Health, Boston, MA

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Dorothea Jameson, Department of Psychology and Visual Science, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Lawrence Klein, Department of Economics, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Morton Panish, AT&T Bell Laboratories (retired), Springfield, NJ

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Lubert Stryer, Department of Neurobiology, Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA

Sam Treiman, Department of Physics, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ

Martha Vaughan, Laboratory of Cellular Metabolism, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD

Julia Weertman, Department of Materials Science and Engineering, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

E-an Zen, Department of Geology, University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Carol Corillon, Director
Patricia Evers, Program Officer
Kelly Koeppl, Program Officer
Chrystyne Talley, Senior Program Assistant