

## **OPENING REMARKS**

### **“Developing U.S. Responses to Countries that Torture: Survivor Witnesses from Four Continents”**

**Thursday June 23, 2011 3:00 p.m.**  
**Rayburn 2168 (Gold Room)**

Good afternoon. I would like to thank everyone for attending this briefing on the very important issue of torture. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International for its work on this issue and for assembling this distinguished panel of survivors and experts. I would also like to give my appreciation to my Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission colleague, Congressman Dan Burton, and his office for their assistance, as well as to Commission intern Jann Futterman for helping organize today’s event.

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission has consistently been a leader in strongly condemning the practice of torture worldwide and in supporting the people who have made the battle against torture so central to their lives.

In that light, it is a great honor to be here today to open this briefing on torture. I hope that today’s discussion forces this issue into the public consciousness and that it inspires all of us to do our part in preventing these grave abuses.

There are certain human rights that are so fundamental and inalienable that it becomes the responsibility of the world community to ensure that they are always upheld. The right to individual dignity is one of those principles, deserving the utmost respect and attention by both

governments and individuals. When human dignity is sacrificed at the hands of torture, we all suffer.

The United States has a long tradition of international leadership against torture. As such, it is the United States government's responsibility to fight on behalf of the thousands of people worldwide who are victims of torture every year. Those of us in public service, whether as elected officials or as staff, have an obligation to be voices for the voiceless, advocates for the forgotten, and representatives of what is right. And all individuals in society must show the courage to act in the face of wrong and, in the words of Mahatma Ghandi, "be the change we wish to see in the world."

Thank you once again for being here.