

Ladies and Gentleman, thank you for joining us today for a briefing on "torture in the OSCE region."

In 1998, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring June 26 to be United Nations Day in Support of the Victims of Torture. In advance of this year's commemoration, the Helsinki Commission is holding this briefing to focus on the continuing problem of torture in the OSCE region.

The issue of torture is one of long-standing concern to the Commission. We have addressed it at numerous Commission hearings and briefings. We have raised it at OSCE implementation meetings. We urged inclusion of language on torture adopted by the OSCE Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Istanbul last November.

In addition, I introduced and worked for the passage of the Torture Victims Relief Act in 1998, a bill designed to support torture treatment programs in the United States and around the world.

Unfortunately, in spite of these efforts, torture continues to be a persistent problem in every single OSCE country, including the United States. There is no OSCE country that does not have some instances of torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

But while every country must work to address this compelling human rights problem, there are some places where the scale and magnitude of the use of torture is so egregious, that it cries out for concerted action. Participants at a March OSCE meeting on torture gave several examples of countries or contexts that they argued deserved particular attention.

First, conflict settings. Where violent conflicts have erupted, or where there are perceived threats to national security, there is an increased likelihood that torture or other forms of inhuman treatment will occur. This has certainly been the case in Serbia and other conflicts in the OSCE region, such as Chechnya.

Second, there are countries where torture does not merely appear as the tool of misguided police officials looking for a quick and easy way to obtain a confession, but where it is used systematically as a means of political repression. This is certainly the case under the repressive dictatorship of President Karimov in Uzbekistan.

Third, religious and ethnic minorities, such as Jehovah's Witnesses in Turkmenistan or Roma in Hungary, are often singled out for torture or police brutality.

Finally, torture may threaten the very foundations of democracy, as it has in Turkey, where the government's counter-productive reaction to the abuse of torture has led to violations of other

rights, including the denial of fair trials and restrictions on freedom of speech.

At today's briefing, we will consider two of these specific problem areas -- Chechnya and Turkey -- as well as efforts to prevent torture and treat torture survivors. We are fortunate to have with us today three individuals who have dedicated themselves to addressing these problems.

First, we will hear from Dr. Inge Genefke. Dr. Genefke is a founding member of the Danish Medical Group of Amnesty International. She was also a founding member of the Denmark-based International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, established in 1985 to provide specialized treatment and rehabilitation services for the victims of torture, and she now serves as its Secretary-General. She was honored on June 10 by an award from the American Medical Association for unique achievements of the highest standard in the medical field. Dr. Genefke has monitored several high profile trials of medical professionals in Turkey and was present during the sentencing of Dr. Veli Lok.

We are also joined by Maureen Greenwood, the Advocacy Director for Europe and the Middle East in the Washington office of Amnesty International USA. Ms. Greenwood has been traveling to the former Soviet Union since 1986. From 1993-95, during the outbreak of what has become known as "the first Chechen War," she worked in Moscow as the US representative in the Union of Councils' Russian-American Bureau on Human Rights. And although we have asked her to discuss Amnesty International's most recent report on torture and rape in the on-going Chechen conflict, I would like to note that she has also worked on the problem of torture in Turkey.

Finally we will hear from Douglas A. Johnson. Doug Johnson is Executive Director of the Minnesota-based Center for the Victims of Torture, the first organization of its kind in the United States. Mr. Johnson served as a public member on the U.S. Delegation to the OSCE's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and is member of the OSCE's Advisory Panel for the Prevention of Torture. He works with other treatment centers in the United States and around the globe and I particularly look forward to his observations on the implementation of the Torture Victims Relief Act.