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HON. MARTIN O. SABO
OF MINNESOTA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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In Support of the Torture Victims Relief Act and the Center for Victims of Torture

Mr. SABO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the important work that is being done to aid victims of torture, and to reemphasize my support for the reauthorization of the Torture Victims Relief Act (TVRA).

Minneapolis, Minnesota, is home to the United States first comprehensive torture treatment center, the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT). When CVT opened in 1985 they were the first center in the United States and only the third in the entire world.

Freedom from torture is a universal and fundamental human right. Yet torture continues to take place in more than 120 countries worldwide. It is estimated that one-third of the world's 12 million refugees are victims of torture. Politicians, journalists, teachers, students, religious leaders, trade union and human rights activists are all targets. The aim of torture is not to kill the victim, but to break down the victim's personality. Crippled, traumatized, and humiliated, the victims are returned to their communities as a warning to others.

Torture is fundamentally a political weapon, employed by repressive regimes to shape cultures through fear. For over a decade, what the clients in Minnesota have taught us, as well as victims from over 70 other nations of the world, is that torture:

- Targets leadership of the opposition, to snuff out creativity and emerging movements, which may threaten the regimes corrupt hold on society;
- Sends a message of fear throughout the network of that leader's family and community of followers and admirers. As a bishop from Africa once said about the meaning of torture, the message is clear: "If they'll do this to me, what will they do to my flock?"
- In Minnesota we have also learned how traumas of this severity and scale have a trans-generational effect, shaping the health, the hopes and the aspirations of future generations.

Because of these significant and predictable effects, torture is the most effective weapon against democracy. Even after a dictatorial regime has fallen, as it has in Iraq, we can expect that the impact of torture will be felt for generations: leadership broken and lost; their families and communities still frightened and disengaged from public life; a profound lack of trust in public institutions, police, and courts; a lesson in forced political apathy learned and lived out every day.

There are more than 500,000 torture survivors in the United States alone --refugees and asylum seekers who have fled repressive regimes. In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of victims of torture seeking help at U.S. rehabilitation centers. In the U.S. there are 34 rehabilitation centers and programs joined together under the National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs, which was first started by the Center for Victims of Torture in Minnesota.

I have seen leadership restored and people made whole after they have received care at CVT. Restoring a torture survivor to full health has a lasting benefit for the entire community. Former clients of CVT are now public school teachers, small business owners, nurses, doctors and more. I would like to commend CVT for their tireless work on behalf of torture victims in the U.S. and worldwide, and encourage my colleagues to support the reauthorization of the Torture Victims Relief Act.