

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



February 18, 2015

President Barack Obama

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

In advance of your trip to Chicago to designate the Pullman district a national monument, I am writing to ask that you address another more sinister historical legacy on Chicago's far South Side.

If you visit the Hotel Florence at the Pullman State Historic Site during your trip, you will be steps away from Chicago's Area 2 Police Headquarters. It was here that infamous Chicago Police Detective Jon Burge served as a commander until 1988, overseeing what would later be described as "an astounding pattern or plan... to torture certain suspects... into confessing to crimes."

From 1972 to 1991, Burge and the officers under his command systematically tortured more than 100 men and women of color at Area 2 and 3 police stations. Suspects were beaten, subjected to electric shocks, had plastic bags placed over their heads and were threatened with mock executions.

After two decades of racially motivated police torture under Burge's command, survivors are still demanding reparations to this day. I hope that you will also elevate and honor their stories while in you are in Chicago.

Although Burge was convicted in federal court for perjury and obstruction of justice, neither he nor any of the detectives he supervised have been prosecuted for committing torture. Statutes of limitations not only prevent survivors from obtaining justice for these crimes, but also from obtaining financial reparations. On February 14, 2015 Jon Burge walked free of house arrest after serving fewer than four years in prison. The following day, torture survivors and activists held a "people's hearing" in downtown Chicago with hundreds in attendance, calling attention to their ongoing struggle to leave the past – and their trauma – behind.

It has been decades since these allegations of torture first came to light. For all of that time, survivors and their family members have been denied justice and the reparations they need to heal. Nineteen torture survivors are still behind bars. Now, the city of Chicago has an opportunity to step out from the shadow of Burge's legacy and pass a historic ordinance, entitled Reparations for Chicago Police Torture Survivors.

The ordinance in question was introduced into the Chicago City Council in fall of 2014 and seeks to provide financial compensation, psychological and vocational counseling and other redress for the systematic torture committed by Burge and the detectives working under his command. Twenty-eight members of the Chicago City Council have sponsored and or publicly supported the ordinance, yet it remains stalled pending a hearing.

Mr. President, your choice to designate Pullman, the birthplace of the nation's first industry-wide walkout and the first African-American labor union to win a collective bargaining agreement with a major US corporation, as a national monument is a clear commitment to celebrating our nation's diverse history and struggles for justice. I hope that you will also celebrate the struggles and resilience of Chicago police torture survivors and publicly support passage of the reparations ordinance during your trip to Chicago.

Your return to the South Side of Chicago to honor Pullman also speaks to your own deep connection to the community – before you were the President of the United States, your work first as a young community organizer and then as executive director of the Developing Communities Project brought you into some of the same predominantly African American communities that Jon Burge and his infamous “midnight crew” targeted with arrests, interrogations and torture. I ask that you, once again, take these men and women's stories personally, and meet with survivors of Chicago police torture during your visit to Chicago.

Thank you.

Steven W. Hawkins  
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