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**Amnesty International/Reprieve conference: Torture is killing a person without them dying**

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"I didn't want to make a big, grand speech. I am just deeply hurt," a mother said after talking about her son detained in Guantánamo Bay. As they did yesterday at the conference hosted by Amnesty International and Reprieve, family members expressed the difficulties and desperation of not knowing if their loved one is being tortured and whether they will ever see them again.

One US research group estimates there to be some eight to 15 secret detention sites throughout the world in at least eight countries. It's believed that detainees are being moved from site to site to evade public knowledge and scrutiny and that foreign intelligence agents are being used to extract information, usually through torture and ill-treatment.

Prolonged incommunicado detention can amount to torture. A Canadian, picked up in a US Airport, sent to Jordan and then to Syria, agreed -- the 10 months and 10 days he was held alone in a dark cell 0.9 meters long by 1.8 meters deep by 2.1 meters high was torture, as were the beatings he received.

When people are held in secret detention and the authorities refuse to disclose their fate or whereabouts, they are described as having been "disappeared". Such "disappearances" often go hand-in-hand with torture and other ill-treatment.

Family members of people who have been "disappeared" are themselves being ill-treated when deliberately deprived of any information and are desperate for news. But as a panelist noted, "while the government practice of 'disappearances' may erase someone from society for a time, the memory of the person cannot be erased. This memory is what spurs family, friends, activists to search for them, no matter what. Eventually, the truth comes out."

The conference discussed the medical impact and effects of torture. One medical expert described torture as "killing a person without them dying". Juvenile detentions, problems with the repatriation of former detainees, as well as litigation strategies and the role of the UN in defense of individuals' rights were addressed by ex-detainees, family members, lawyers and other activists.

Despite the immense challenges, participants are making new contacts, sharing ideas and strategies and exploring new approaches to combating torture together.

The conference day ended on a rousing note with an impromptu rap performed by an ex-detainee released earlier this year after more than two and a half years in Guantánamo Bay.