“Caring and Advocating for Torture Survivors”
A Lecture by Dr. Allen Keller
Director, Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture

Sponsored by the Vilcek Foundation, in cooperation with the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture

The Vilcek Foundation is proud to present Dr. Allen Keller, an internationally recognized expert in the evaluation, treatment, and documentation of torture survivors. In his lecture this evening, Dr. Keller will describe the comprehensive recovery services offered by the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture (PSOT), which encompass not only mental health and medical care but also legal and social services; he will detail the crucial roles that research, education, and outreach play in the multidisciplinary approach taken by the program to ease the short- and long-term suffering of survivors from around the world. Dr. Keller will also explain how and why academics, scientists, and artists are among those most often targeted by governments that use torture to achieve their ends.

Along with Dr. Keller, we welcome two special guests, both participants in the PSOT program: Tibetan-born artist Samten Dakpa and Mauritanian-born mathematician Cheikhna Mahawa.

**Dr. Allen Keller**

In addition to directing the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture and the NYU School of Medicine Center for Health and Human Rights, Dr. Allen Keller is Associate Professor of Medicine, New York University School of Medicine.

A graduate of NYU School of Medicine, Dr. Keller completed his residency and chief residency in Primary Care Internal Medicine at Bellevue Hospital/NYU Medical Center. He is a member of the Advisory Board of Physicians for Human Rights and a past member of the American College of Physicians Ethics and Human Rights Committee. When not teaching medical ethics at NYU School of Medicine, Dr. Keller writes, speaks, and consults on issues relating to ethics, health, and human rights, such as the medical and social consequences of land mines in Cambodia, refugee health, and prisoner access to health care; he is also dedicated to documenting the incidence of torture and other human rights abuses worldwide.

Widely honored for his human rights work and care of survivors of torture, Dr. Keller has received the Barbara Chester Award from the Hopi Foundation, the Arthur C. Helton Human Rights Award from the American Immigration Law Association, the Humanism in Medicine Award — the latter which he received twice from graduating medical school classes at NYU — and New York University’s Distinguished Alumnus Award.
Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture

The Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture was founded in 1995 to provide comprehensive medical, mental health, and social and legal services to survivors of torture and other human rights abuses. The first of its kind in the New York City area, the program seeks to address the complex and interrelated needs of torture survivors and their families, as they learn to cope with the effects of physical and mental abuse, at the same time they face the challenges of resettlement in the United States. In 2010 alone, the program served more than 680 people from 80 countries — approximately 140 of them new clients. It is estimated that more than 400,000 survivors of torture now live in the United States, and the number of people seeking the help of the team at NYU/Bellevue continues to rise every year. The program has established an international reputation for the excellence of its clinical, educational, and research activities.

To learn more about the program, visit www.survivorsoftorture.org.

The Vilcek Foundation

The Vilcek Foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the Foundation, to honor the contributions of foreign-born scholars and artists living in the United States, was inspired by the couple’s careers in biomedical science and art history, respectively, as well as their personal experiences and appreciation for the opportunities they received as newcomers to this country. The Foundation hosts events to promote the work of immigrants, and awards annual prizes to prominent immigrant biomedical scientists and artists who make outstanding contributions to American society.

To learn more about the Vilcek Foundation, visit www.vilcek.org.

Special Guests Samten Dakpa and Cheikhna Mahawa

The harrowing experiences, and subsequent triumph, of both Mr. Dakpa and Mr. Mahawa, are testimony to the healing that can be achieved when effective care is coupled with personal perseverance.

Samten Dakpa was born in the village of Rabshi, in eastern Tibet. As a child, he spent much of his time herding livestock; in the quiet hours while the animals were grazing, he began to develop his latent artistic gifts, using the natural materials in his environment — soil, snow, rocks. His creations were praised by members of his community, and won several regional competitions; unfortunately, his achievements also drew the attention of local authorities, who did not approve of his paintings of traditional Tibetan images. While still a teen, he was arrested and tortured. He eventually escaped and made his way to the United States, where he entered the Bellevue/NYU Program and began the long road to recovery, for both his injured hands and wounded spirit.

Cheikhna Mahawa, a native of Mauritania, was arrested and brutalized for his efforts to improve education for the poor and to win the right to teach in classic Arabic. Arrested for organizing protests, the torment began: a rifle butt was jammed into his mouth; he was forced to stare at the sun; and beaten when he failed to corral a cockroach in a circle. Today, he considers himself victorious, his commitment to education undiminished. A mathematician, he teaches calculus and linear algebra at City College of New York, while pursuing his doctorate. Through the Bellevue/NYU Program, his jaw and persistent back pain have been treated, along with the emotional trauma of his ordeal.