



PRESS RELEASE

UN Day for Victims of Torture

No more time for indifference on torture!

Geneva, Tunis, Brussels, 25 June 2015

On the eve of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture the principal global civil society coalition against torture recalls the plight of thousands of victims of torture across the world. It is time for a new commitment to eradicate such practice once and for all.

'Torture continues to be one of the darkest realities of our times. It is a horrific and gruesome practice happening around the world, typically clouded in secrecy and matched with impunity', said the OMCT Secretary General on the occasion of the UN Day for Victims of Torture.

Torture breaks the individuals it is inflicted upon leaving traces for the rest of their lives and very often destroys the very fabric of societies. It corrupts our institutions and legal systems if we leave it - as so often - unaddressed. Ultimately, societies that accept torture will pay a high price in the longer term. Torture is used today for many purposes and justified with fighting terrorism, organized crime, delinquency or protecting democratic principles or stimulating economic growth. It can be political or non-political and occurs in situations of repression but also in democracies. It is troubling to see in our global work that torture hits typically those population groups who are often forgotten such as the socially vulnerable, marginalized and minority or indigenous populations as well as criminal suspects.

The OMCT provides through its global victims fund support for legal, social and medical rehabilitation across the globe and advocates for effective remedies and reparation for those who were subjected to torture. In light of the many crisis around the world there is a dramatic mismatch between the needs for support and the resources available.

'We have no shortage of international legal standards. But we need to do much more to translate them into practice so that torture is effectively prevented and not only prohibited on paper. Those who become victims to such treatments should be able to access real remedies and get the assistance they need', said Gerald Staberock.

In honour of the day for victims of torture, the OMCT, the leading global civil society network against torture, is calling for States to adopt effective legal and policy frameworks that prevent torture and do provide effective and real life support to victims. In the course of

the next two days the international secretariat of OMCT with members of its global SOS torture network will call for specific steps to eradicate torture in events and campaigns organised in **Mexico, Colombia, Ivory Coast, Togo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tunisia, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Switzerland and the United States**. These are part of OMCT's global campaign 'nothing can justify torture'. This year's campaign is also associated with the Special Rapporteur on Torture's campaign for a 'torture free world'.

The events in partnership with OMCT member organizations illustrate the fundamental role that civil society plays in defending the rights of those subject to torture. We have seen in many parts of the world a wave of restrictions placed on civil society documenting and reporting on torture. It is unconceivable that those who take on the case of torture are subject to harassment, intimidation and in some cases even detention.

'As we commemorate the victims of torture we are also reminded of the need to support the many members of the anti-torture movement who are suffering harassment and repression because of their work. Representative of this is our call for the immediate release of our General Assembly member Leyla Yunus and her husband, arbitrarily detained in Azerbaijan' declares the OMCT.

Sadly, we have learned along the years that torture and impunity are not privy to the developing world but also in democracies with a tradition of the rule of law. The US torture policy with plain impunity is a case in point. In an increasingly divisive world with an emergence of non-State actors that appear to deny basic principles of humanity such persistent violations of the law and double standards gravely undermine the global cause against torture.

This year's UN anti-torture day takes place in the midst of major migration crises across the world when refugees are seeking safe havens and a life in dignity. In recent months we have seen shocking actions when refugees are sent back to the high seas and when States, including in Europe, are denying fundamental protections of refugees. In an alarming number of cases, refugees are subjected to conditions that amount to cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment or sent back to places where they may risk being faced with torture.

'Respecting human dignity and ensuring that we are not sending back people to torture must remain a non-negotiable baseline if we are not to be complicit in torture', recalls Gerald Staberock.

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The OMCT wishes to thank the European Commission for its financial support to the OMCT activities on June 26 that are part of its campaign of "nothing can justify torture under any circumstances".

