A photograph of two women in conversation. The woman on the left is in profile, wearing a green and yellow patterned top. The woman on the right is facing her, wearing a pink floral top and pink pants, with a black bag strap over her shoulder. The background shows a clothesline with laundry hanging in an outdoor setting.

ASSISTING SURVIVORS OF TORTURE 2007-2018

*Fund for emergency assistance
to victims of torture*

OMCT
SOS-Torture Network

“A State that tortures lacks confidence in itself. A State that tortures is one that is ailing. And as is often the case in psychiatry, the patient may be unaware of their condition. They need the doctor. And that is where OMCT comes in.”

François Longchamp, the then president of the Council of State of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, in his address to the OMCT General Assembly in November 2016.

The World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) is today the main international coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) striving to put an end to torture, summary executions, forced disappearances and every form of punishment or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. With over 200 organizations affiliated with its SOS-Torture Network, OMCT is the foremost NGO network engaged in the protection and promotion of human rights around the globe. Both in terms of the type of assistance it offers and its outreach, OMCT is one of the few actors capable of providing holistic assistance to survivors of torture.

Tens of thousands of victims each year...

By its very nature torture is covert, which makes it difficult to establish the exact number of its victims. However, estimates put the annual figure at tens of thousands, mainly underprivileged people with little awareness of their rights. Since 1986 our direct assistance programme has come to the rescue of torture survivors and their families, often at the request of local organizations affiliated with the SOS-Torture Network.

01

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

A survivor, their family or a local organization puts in a request for assistance following a case of torture.



02

ASSESSING THE REQUEST

OMCT assesses the request for assistance and verifies the torture case received from its local partners



03

GRANTING OF ASSISTANCE

OMCT offers legal, medical and/or social assistance.



04

FOLLOW-UP OF CASES

Once OMCT has granted assistance to victims, it works to ensure their full recovery and then reviews their needs.



Recovering one's dignity The long road to recovery

"When you have endured torture, the humiliation and shame that you feel causes you even greater damage than the physical pain." Dr Laurent Subilia, who has worked with OMCT on many occasions, would know.

"By rebuilding the victim's life, we safeguard future society."

Dr Laurent Subilia

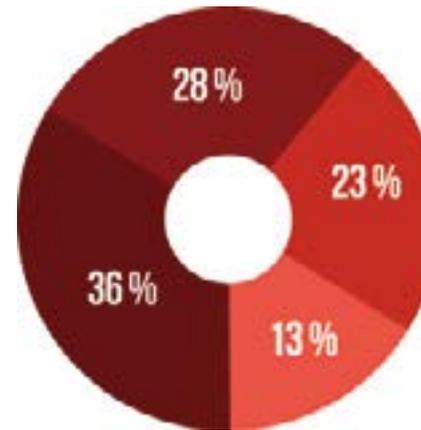
In the past 30 years, the Geneva doctor has treated thousands of survivors of atrocities everywhere—from Bosnia and Herzegovina to Syria, Sri Lanka and Venezuela, along with Chechnya, Egypt and many other places where torturers routinely violate human dignity. "While we are able to perform surgical miracles, the greatest challenge remains to rehabilitate the survivor socially. The challenge is to restore the confidence shattered by the torturers. In other words, we need a special medical approach that must coordinate the effort to rehabilitate the individual as a whole."

Furthermore, whether they are from here or elsewhere, victims of extreme violence need to be followed up in a comprehensive, multidisciplinary manner, sometimes over the long term. The issue goes well beyond the welfare of individuals: "If parents receive no treatment or support, their children suffer. By rebuilding the victim's life, we safeguard future society."

Over

1400

torture survivors and their families benefited from assistance between 2007 and 2018.



- ▶ **Medical assistance:** meeting medical expenses to help ensure torture survivors' physical and psychological recovery;
- ▶ **Legal assistance:** support to survivors so that they could obtain official recognition of acts of torture, as well as justice and reparation for harm inflicted on them;
- ▶ **Social support:** response to the needs of survivors and their families to help them reintegrate into society;
- ▶ **Multidimensional support:** aid to survivors, involving a combination of two or three types of assistance, depending on their needs.

607 cases

in

59 countries



Between 2007 and 2018, OMCT processed 607 requests for assistance that at times included several torture survivors or their families.

VICTIM ACCOUNTS

Guantanamo: a catalogue of horrors

Atahir* was no more than a child when he was arrested in his native Pakistan. The year was 2001, and he was handed over to the United States authorities in Afghanistan. A year later, he landed in Guantanamo, where he ended up spending over seven years without ever being formally charged. His jailers inflicted on him a seemingly endless catalogue of horrors: electric shocks, being strung up by the wrists for six hours a day, beatings, extreme temperatures, sleep deprivation, cigarette burns, humiliation and threats against his family.

By 2009, when Atahir was released, he was suffering from severe physical and psychological effects of the torture. To make matters worse, he was stuck in a country whose language he did not speak, and where he knew no one.



© Mike H

OMCT's intervention gave him a new lease of life. Medical treatment, as well as professional training enabled Atahir to gradually regain self-confidence and rebuild trust in others. He is now a married father of three and owner of a fruit and vegetable shop.

Blind but seeking justice

For Shah Jalal*, it was a July evening like any other. After a grueling day selling fruit and vegetables on the streets of Khulna, in Bangladesh, he was buying powdered milk for his 10-month-old baby girl when the police arrested and accused him of theft. At the police station, they beat him up severely and demanded the equivalent of CHF 1,800 to release him—even though he could hardly afford to feed his family. They subsequently took him out of the city and gouged out his eyes with a wrench. His wife found him on a hospital floor the following day, barely alive.

A local partner notified OMCT, which immediately provided assistance to keep the family going. Supported by local activists, the family filed a lawsuit and pushed back against constant threats from the police who tried to pressure them to drop the lawsuit. While Shah Jalal remains severely traumatized, he is resolute. "I will never regain my sight, but I want to get justice".



© Danai Khampiranon

Torturing the father so as to gag the son

When the Chechen authorities arrested Alexei* in 2004, their aim was to force his son, Sacha*, to return home. Sacha had sought refuge in Europe and never missed an opportunity to denounce the abuses committed by a regime that had subjected him to torture. His father was about to suffer a similar fate.

Eleven months of torture left Alexei physically and psychologically broken: "I was treated like vermin. They tortured me and beat me up severely," he said from exile in Norway

*« I was treated like vermin. » Alexei**

Father and son filed lawsuits, in the European Court of Human Rights, against the Russian and Chechen governments for unlawful detention and torture. They directly challenged the future president of the Chechen republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, whom Sacha accused of taking part in interrogating him and beating him "about three times a week".

In January 2009, Sacha was murdered in the streets of Vienna. Alexei was sure he would be the next target. Notified as a matter of urgency, OMCT organized to move Alexei from Norway and paid rent for the first few months for his new apartment in a safe place.

*Not their real names



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