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Addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture

URGENT APPEALS

Work with OMCT to address the poverty, inequality and discrimination that are root causes of torture

OMCT is looking for NGO partners who wish to act against the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture and other forms of violence, including domestic violence. This will involve documenting and issuing urgent appeals to end violations in situations such as those listed below. OMCT appeals are directed to OMCT SOS-Torture Network members (282 around the world) and to governments, the United Nations, development and financial agencies and private actors: they call for an end to the economic and social policies and practices that lead to violence. OMCT will follow up on appeals to monitor corrective action.

Poverty, inequality, discrimination and other violations of economic, social and cultural rights are often the root causes of torture and other serious violations of human rights: violence can, in many cases, be reduced or eliminated by acting on those root causes. This has been documented by OMCT,¹ which is now implementing a project with the support of the European Union aimed at fighting torture by addressing its root causes.

How are denials of economic, social and cultural rights related to torture and other forms of violence?

- *The poor, excluded and other vulnerable groups are often the first and most numerous victims of violence, including torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.*
- *Levels of violence in a given community or society can be such that individuals or groups are unable to enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights.*
- *Violence is inflicted on persons because they demand respect for economic, social or cultural rights – their own or those of others.*
- *Denials of economic, social and cultural rights are carried out so violently as to be considered ill-treatment under international treaties.*
- *Certain violations of economic, social or cultural rights can be characterized as cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, or in some cases as a denial of the right to life.*
- *Policies and programmes by governments, private actors or development and financial institutions can exacerbate poverty and inequalities and lead to increased levels of official, criminal and domestic violence.*

¹ See the OMCT publication "Attacking the Root Causes of Torture: Poverty, Inequality and Violence. An Interdisciplinary Study" available from OMCT, www.omct.org

OMCT urgent appeals to date

OMCT urgent appeals expose and address violations of economic, social and cultural rights that generate – or risk generating – acts of torture and other forms of violence. They mobilise support for victims, exert pressure on the competent authorities and call for corrective action.

OMCT urgent appeals have drawn international attention to cases across Africa, North, Central and South America, Asia and Europe. The appeals raise the profile of local cases that would not otherwise receive adequate national or international attention, give voice to marginalised and vulnerable populations and help bring about positive change.

For example:

- *In December 2003, OMCT called for action regarding the plight of 7000 Dalits in Calcutta, India who were forcibly and illegally evicted from their homes by a Rapid Action Force, and who had to settle in the Belgachia garbage dump, where they lived in inhuman conditions. As a consequence of this eviction, a 3 year old child belonging to this community died of starvation.*
- *In March 2004, OMCT issued an urgent appeal following the killing, by landmine explosions and sniper fire, of 17 civilians while they were attempting to gather forest produce for their livelihood in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation.*
- *In January 2006, OMCT wrote to the President of the Republic of Chad and international agencies objecting to the revision of a national law governing the allocation of petroleum revenues, and specifically the diversion of funds away from Chad's poverty reduction strategy, with serious implications for the poorest and most vulnerable members of the population.*
- *In April 2006, OMCT acted to prevent violence by calling for legislation in Colombia to be rapidly corrected in order to ensure the right of internally displaced persons to return to their land. OMCT warned that without such changes, serious future conflicts between returning displaced persons and those who have occupied their land would almost certainly take place and imperil hopes for sustainable peace.*
- *In June 2006, OMCT drew international attention to the violent eviction of Egyptian farmers from Sarando village from their land, as well as false charges brought against these farmers, the holding of farmers' wives as hostages, the arrest of children and the trial of several persons, including women, on fabricated charges.*
- *In June 2006, OMCT also submitted an extensive report to the European Commission, Council and Parliament in connection with the EU's review of its Partnership Agreement with Egypt. This report highlighted the negative impact on Egyptian farmers and their families of the implementation of this Agreement, and called on the EU to help ensure respect for the fundamental rights of Egyptian farmers, including the right to an adequate standard of living.*
- *In January 2007, OMCT appealed for an end to the arbitrary arrest, detention and ill-treatment of 46 male and 25 female prison guards in Yaoundé, Cameroon, who had taken strike action to protest against their living and working conditions. The guards were released ten days later.*

Drawing attention to situations such as these is one of the most effective ways of influencing their outcome. **Do you know of a case of this kind that should be brought to the attention of the international community?** Contact the OMCT Secretariat with details.

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