



WORLD ORGANISATION AGAINST TORTURE (OMCT)

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PRESS RELEASE

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Geneva, 25 November 2010. On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) calls again the attention of the world to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), theatre of the most deadly conflict of the last 50 years and massively affected by rapes committed on a daily basis by belligerents. The women and men fighting against this scourge in turn become victims of criminals who act with total impunity. It was to support their action and make it widely known that OMCT carried out a mission of solidarity to the country in February 2010.

Since then, new waves of mass rapes emerged. The extreme high level of sexual violence against women is used as a 'weapon of war' in order to control the area with 'sexual terror', to break down the families and communities to whom the women belong. A woman who has been raped in the DRC risks expulsion from her home or community. As a woman explains in OMCT's film 'Indifference and Impunity',¹ on its mission to the country '*One woman belongs to one man and has a woman been with another man, she loses her value. That's why it is difficult for a woman who has been raped to reintegrate into her household: people are ashamed of her and the husband rejects her. The women are alone, excluded from their family and community.*' Faced with these consequences, women victims of sexual torture are frequently reluctant to report sexual violence out of fear and shame.

The lack of reporting by women is used by the DRC authorities as an excuse for inaction and the torturers can commit their crimes with impunity. The current climate of impunity is a major factor in the continued systematic practice of rape. As clarified during the mission: '*Rape has become banal and (...) is being committed not only by soldiers but also by civilians. As no strong actions against the perpetrators are being taken, men believe that they can commit rape and other acts of torture against women in their custody without incurring any punishment.*' The perpetrators of the rapes return to the place where they committed the crime and the people who denounced them publicly are now the ones afraid for their security. In the movie it is alleged that the government does not cooperate to punish the perpetrated *in the name of peace*.

The growing acceptance of relativist theories with respect to the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment in particular, under pressure from arguments emphasizing, "public security", or "culture" or like in the DRC "in the name of peace" is one of the problems nourishing *the erosion*

¹ To watch the movie: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCij_APWI-4&feature=mfu_in_order&list=UL

of the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, which OMCT considers today as the most serious challenge ever in its fight against torture and ill-treatment

In order to raise public awareness of this problem OMCT launched an *International Campaign for the Absolute Prohibition of Torture and Ill-Treatment*² which is online and open for signature.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, OMCT recalls that torture of women is a fundamental violation of human rights and one which is absolutely and unreservedly prohibited under international law. In spite of the international legal prohibitions on torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, the torture of women continues to occur in the DRC as well as in many other countries around the world. When women become the targets of torture or ill-treatment, the act often is of a sexual nature. As a result of the determinative impact of gender on the torture, women have been denied equal protection against torture under both international and national law and there is widespread impunity for the perpetrators of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment committed against women.

Contact:

Anne-Laurence Lacroix, OMCT Deputy Secretary General, Tel. +41 22 809 49 39

We are pleased to invite you to a public presentation of the documentary film “Indifference and Impunity” followed by an expert discussion. The event will take place on **Tuesday, 7th December 2010 in Geneva**, Conference room Mahatma Gandhi, Maison des Associations, Rue des Savoises 15, 1202 Genève.

For any further information/inscription please contact: ms@omct.org

² <http://www.omct.org/international-campaigns/campaign-prohibition-torture/>