



**You are invited to join
OMCT in
combating torture and other forms of violence
by fighting poverty and inequality**

Information on OMCT's activities - 2007

The World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) invites NGOs to work with us in order to *prevent torture and other forms of violence by acting on their economic, social and cultural root causes*. OMCT does this by supporting national NGOs to strengthen their capacity to address the root causes of torture and other forms of violence directly with their own national authorities and internationally through alternative reports to United Nations Treaty Bodies, through complaints and appeals in urgent cases addressed to governments, development institutions and the private sector and through the institutions of the European Union. OMCT organises seminars and training courses to help build NGO capacity and invites NGO representatives take part in UN meetings.

OMCT research has demonstrated the strong links between failure to respect economic, social and cultural rights and violence, including torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, violence against women and violence against children. And it has also shown that acting on those root causes can reduce violence.

Fighting violence by acting on its root causes is part of OMCT's overall programme of activities that includes issuing urgent appeals to protect persons at risk of torture, providing emergency assistance to victims, acting to counter violence against women and protect the rights of children, coming to the aid of human rights defenders and submitting reports on these issues to United Nations Treaty Bodies.

Activities addressing the economic, social and cultural roots of violence in 2007

OMCT is implementing a project with the support of the European Union aimed at preventing, reducing and eliminating violence by identifying and acting on its economic, social and cultural root causes. Some of the main points of our activities under this project are set out below. We hope that seeing what we are doing will encourage national NGOs to work with us by submitting cases for urgent interventions (see attached note), preparing with OMCT alternative reports or otherwise joining with us in addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture. Suggestions from NGOs for activities are most welcome.



The European Union through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights is providing substantial support for this project

Submitting alternative reports to *United Nations Treaty Bodies* helps them better understand national human rights situations and make good recommendations to the state. Working closely with national NGOs, OMCT submitted an alternative report on Uzbekistan to the Committee against Torture and has prepared detailed annotated lists of issues for the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to help guide their consideration of State Party reports from the Philippines and Kenya in 2008. OMCT took part in NGO briefings of the Committee on these two countries in late November 2007.

In addition, a report on Uzbekistan was submitted to the *European Parliament* in connection with the Parliament's consideration of EU relations with that country. OMCT also prepared a succinct report on the Philippines for the UN Human Rights Council in connection with the Council's *Universal Periodic Review* of that country.

OMCT has also issued a number of *Urgent interventions* relating to the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence. The following were some of the issues dealt with:

- A village located on coastal backwaters in Tamil Nadu State, India in which the villagers, in attempting to speak out against the negative impacts of an illegally-located aquafarm on their health and economic status, have been subjected to police violence and harassment and have had false charges of a serious nature brought against them by the owner of this farm. (IND041007.ESCR)
- The peaceful opposition by local communities and indigenous people to mining that violates their rights and endangers their way of life on the Filipino Island of Sibuyan. Their objections have been met with violence resulting in the killing of some 17 persons, the most recent the shooting of the leader of a protest movement by a mining company security guard. (PHL301107.ESCR)
- The construction of two large-scale hydropower dams in the Northern Nile Valley in Sudan that has led to repeated violent clashes between local communities and security forces and resulted in a number of civilian deaths. (SDN301107.ESCR)
- A forced eviction in Kolkata, India, carried out violently and in breach of international standards. The victims, including children, women and elderly persons, were physically ill-treated and subjected to violence, and homes and belongings were destroyed by the police. The evictees were not properly informed and were offered neither compensation nor alternative housing. (IND141207.ESCR)
- A proposed open-pit coal mine at Phulbari in Bangladesh that risks seriously affecting the lives of between 50,000 and 500,000 people, including a number of indigenous communities. Many of these affected will be forced to leave their homes and land. The mine has been planned without those directly concerned having been fully informed or adequately consulted and public protests have been met with violence. (BGD211207.ESCR)

These interventions, as you will see from the OMCT website (www.omct.org), are based on action files that provide a detailed analysis of the situation and propose specific remedial action. They are sent to government agencies, UN officials and special procedures mandate holders, international development and financial organizations and private corporations. They are also circulated to OMCT's network of national NGOs with requests that they in turn intervene with governments and others to call for an end to the violations documented. OMCT will follow up to determine the action taken and, as necessary, encourage further efforts to address the specific problems identified.

Special Procedures Seminars. The 2007 Special Procedures Seminar took place in Geneva from 18 to 23 June in parallel with the annual meeting of UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders in order to consider how to address the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence through the UN Special Procedures System. Representatives of national human rights NGOs from some 14 countries took part.

Participants held in-depth discussions with leading special procedures mandate holders responsible for issues relating to; torture, indigenous peoples, the right to health, arbitrary detention, the protection of human rights defenders and violations of human rights by private security forces. The participants explored how those mandates and the others in the special procedures system could help them attack the root causes of torture and violence in their countries and what national NGOs needed to do to help make the special procedures effective. Attached is the final press release on the seminar and the seminar report is available at www.omct.org.

The **Special Procedures Seminar for 2008** is scheduled from 23 to 27 June 2008 in Geneva to coincide again with the annual meeting of mandate holders.

Regional Seminars are planned for Africa, Latin America and Asia over the project's 3 year period. Unfortunately, the **regional seminar for Africa**, originally scheduled for November 2007 had to be postponed until the first half of 2008. Information on the dates and venue will be circulated in the near future.

The **Latin American** seminar is also scheduled for 2008. The Brazilian Centre for the Studies of Violence in Sao Paulo headed by Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN Secretary-General's Independent Expert on Violence Against Children, has agreed to host the seminar and discussions are now underway.

Our **advocacy** work has included statements to meetings in Geneva and Brussels and OMCT took part in the 9th NGO Human Rights Forum of the EU Presidency in Lisbon on 6 and 7 December last. The topic of the Forum was Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in European Union Policies, with one workshop focusing on Human Rights Defenders and the Promotion of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. OMCT has also advocated with the EU Parliament for the inclusion in the mandate of the new EU Fundamental Rights Agency of the economic, social and cultural factors that contribute to the respect for human rights or which may constitute root causes of violations.

OMCT also advocated with the United Nations for the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and for the draft UN guidelines on extreme poverty and human rights.

Network building. Our team continues to meet with NGOs from countries all over the world to interest them in working with us on the link issues. OMCT has been invited to take part in the ESCR-Net conference and general assembly in March 2008 in Kenya.

The documents and reports mentioned above are available on our website www.omct.org.

We would very much appreciate your feedback on our activities and also any suggestions for opportunities or initiatives we might take in our work. Please feel free to keep in touch with the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Team.

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Best regards,
The OMCT Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Team

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