

PRESS RELEASE

Pakistan: Time for real efforts to eradicate torture and implement the Convention Against Torture

Lahore, Geneva, 26th of June 2014. On the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the World Organization against Torture (OMCT) and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) jointly call on the Government of Pakistan to show its commitment to the abolition of torture and other forms of ill-treatment by effectively implementing the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT).

“Four years ago, Pakistan ratified UNCAT and thereby committed itself to eradicating torture. Yet torture remains today one of the most serious human rights problems in Pakistan. Our country continues to fall short in complying with its obligations. No serious efforts have been made to give effect to the UNCAT. As of today, Pakistan has not submitted its initial state report, which is mandatory under the UNCAT”, says Zohra Yusuf, Chairperson of the HCRP.

Likewise, the government has not enacted the legislation necessary to implement the UNCAT domestically. Quite the contrary, the Protection of Pakistan Ordinance, a draft law pending before the Senate, arms law enforcement with unbridled powers to arrest or shoot anyone suspected of terrorism without the requirement of warrants or other legal safeguards. Hence, this new law significantly increases the risk of torture in the name of security.

“Such a law is a recipe for abuse. The ratification of the Convention Against Torture has raised high expectations about a real culture change. It is time to come together to build an agenda for anti-torture reforms. This is the least we owe to the victims of torture”, said the Secretary General of OMCT Gerald Staberock.

Also the Pakistan Penal Code does not define torture in line with the definition of the UNCAT. Four years after the ratification it is high time that the government criminalizes torture, by first and foremost including the definition of torture into its penal code. The OMCT and the HRCP further call on the government to amend the penal code by introducing the following: 1) guarantees that an order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification for committing torture; 2) an effective mechanism to promptly, impartially and thoroughly investigate any allegation of torture; 3) the right to compensation to the victims of torture and; 4) ban on the use of evidence obtained through torture.

On this day dedicated to the victims of torture HRCP, with the support of the European Commission to the OMCT's project "*Towards Implementation and Accountability*", organizes rallies and walks in Lahore and at all the HRCP centers across the country. These rallies should remind the government of its promise to eradicate torture and to comply with international human rights law. The two organizations will join forces over the next three years to seek the implementation of the UN Convention Against Torture to ensure that "*nothing can justify torture under any circumstances.*"

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The activities carried out in Pakistan on the occasion of the 26th of June – International Day in Support of Victims of Torture – have been conducted thanks to the financial support of the European Commission to the OMCT's project "*Towards implementation and accountability*". The aim of this project is the implementation of the UN Convention against Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment by the States parties.

