

**Joint Statement on the Occasion of the
United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture**

26 June 2007

The United Nations Committee against Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights make the following statement to commemorate the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture:

We welcome the entry into force, last year, of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture as an historic step in the fight against torture and other forms of ill-treatment. This protocol provides for the establishment of independent national preventive mechanisms empowered to undertake visits to places of detention. The Optional Protocol deserves all possible support from States, the United Nations and civil society.

The past year saw another welcome landmark: the adoption by the General Assembly of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. In view of the strong links between torture and enforced disappearances, this treaty brings hope to many who have despaired of the fate of their loved ones.

This year the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Convention against Torture. During the past twenty years, this instrument has served to strengthen effort to prevent of torture and supported victims. However its universal ratification is still to be achieved.

We call on all States to become party to the Convention against Torture and make the declarations provided under articles 21 and 22 of the Convention, on inter-state and individual complaints, in order to maximize transparency and accountability in their fight against torture. States must also cooperate in good faith with the Committee against Torture in implementing its views and recommendations, including in its inquiry capacity.

It is a matter of grave concern that some States have disregarded the Committee's requests not to deport or remove individuals to countries where they run the risk of being tortured. We stress that such actions nullify the effective exercise of the international right of individual petition and seriously undermine the protection of the rights enshrined in the Convention. We remind States, which have accepted the competence of the Committee against Torture to receive individual communications, that they are bound to cooperate with the Committee in applying and giving full effect to the individual complaints procedure.

The application of the death penalty in many parts of the world continues to concern us as persons on death row and executed persons, as well as the members of their families, are, under certain circumstances, also victims of torture. Irrespective of whether the death penalty is considered lawful or not under international law, many issues regarding its application may be contrary to international norms against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In itself, the holding of persons on death row for extended periods, often gives rise to cruelty and inhumanity. The failure to notify prisoners and family members until the last moment, if at all, that the death penalty will be carried out, is unacceptable treatment. The act of execution itself is frequently carried out in circumstances that are degrading and fail to respect the inherent dignity of the person, thus breaching international law. Given these many problems, we call on all States that continue to apply the death penalty to consider a moratorium on its use.

On this International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, we pay tribute to all Governments, civil society organizations and individuals engaged in activities aimed at preventing torture, punishing it and ensuring that all victims obtain redress and have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation, including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible. We express our gratitude to all donors to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and hope that contributions to the Fund will continue to increase, so that more victims of torture and members of their families can receive the assistance they need. We call on all States, in particular those which have been found to be responsible for widespread or systematic practices of torture, to contribute to the Voluntary Fund as part of a universal commitment for the rehabilitation of torture victims.

* * *