

**Joint Statement on the Occasion of the
United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture
26 June 2006**

The United Nations Committee against Torture, the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, 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:

The total ban on torture is firmly entrenched. Justification of its use is anathema. Throughout the world, the consensus relating to the prohibition of torture is being tested and some Member States of the United Nations blatantly contravene this prohibition in violation of international law and international standards. Torture continues to be inflicted at the hands of Governments and their agents, and increasingly on their behalf. We are deeply concerned about the number of reliable reports detailing the practice of torture around the world.

Today, a cornerstone of international human rights law is under unprecedented attack. In many States, including democratic ones, adherence to human rights standards as well as the principles and procedures underpinning the rule of law are being questioned or bypassed on the grounds that established rules do not apply in our current geo-political climate.

Many democratic Governments are engaging in secret activities, effectively curtailing examination and debate, and demonstrating a tendency to avoid judicial scrutiny. Many of the legal and practical safeguards available to prevent torture, including regular and independent monitoring of detention centres, are also being disregarded. Concrete steps should be taken, including mandatory videotaping, to protect against the use of torture in interrogations and to ensure that torture does not taint the criminal justice system. Places of detention should be open to monitoring by independent national human rights institutions, where they exist, and non-governmental organizations.

Governments unquestionably have a duty to protect their citizens from torture. Imminent or clear danger permits limitations on certain human rights. The right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is not one of these. This right must not be subject to any limitation, anywhere, under any condition.

In light of these concerns, we recall that the non-derogable nature of torture is enshrined in the Convention against Torture, and in other international and regional human rights instruments. States are required under customary international and treaty law to take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish acts of torture committed in any territory under their jurisdiction. We call for the universal ratification of the Convention against Torture and urge States parties to the Convention to make the declaration under article 22 providing for individual communications.

We welcome the entry into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention of Torture and consider that this Protocol has the potential to become an effective prevention

mechanism. We also emphasize the importance of establishing and strengthening independent national preventive mechanisms that are empowered to undertake visits to places of detention as required by the Protocol.

Finally, as we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, we would like to recall the millions of victims who have suffered as a result of torture, including gender-based violence inflicted on women and violence against children during conflicts. We remind Governments and others of their obligations to ensure that all such victims have access to redress and have an enforceable right to seek and obtain compensation, including the means for comprehensive rehabilitative services. In this regard, we pay tribute to the organizations around the world which provide these essential services to victims and their families. We are also grateful to the donors whose support enables the Fund to provide financial assistance to organizations and torture victims in need. We call on all members of the international community, private entities and individuals to contribute generously to the Fund to ensure the continued availability of assistance to torture victims and their families.