



Seeking Justice for Torture: a Victim-Centred Approach

Panel discussion convened by the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
in partnership with the Permanent Mission of Denmark to the UN in Geneva

11 April 2018, 11:00 to 12:30
Salle IX, Palais des Nations, Geneva



From left to right: Prisoner sits in his cell in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan © Eric Gourlan; A Syrian victim of torture demonstrates how he was tortured © OHCHR; victims of torture in Sierra Leone recount their stories © OHCHR

Background:

Access to Justice as a Form of Rehabilitation for Torture Victims

Every year, thousands of victims of torture worldwide embark on the long and arduous journey of seeking justice and redress for the harm that they have suffered. Access to an effective judicial remedy is a victims' right under international law. The restoration of a victim's dignity should be the ultimate objective of redress and their active participation in any legal process is paramount for achieving this goal. Nevertheless, victims face innumerable obstacles throughout the legal process, which is complex and often lengthy, in domestic, regional and international jurisdictions. Victims therefore require holistic support to prevent re-traumatization, promote empowerment and contribute to rehabilitation.

The UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

Over the past four decades, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (the Fund) has supported civil society organizations worldwide to provide legal, medical, psychological and social assistance to nearly 50,000 victims of torture every year. Many of these projects provide the interdisciplinary support required by victims to obtain judicial remedy and important lessons can be drawn from this collective experience. The Fund convenes annual workshops so that victims, human rights defenders and practitioners assisted by the Fund can share best practices and develop effective responses to the most pressing challenges confronting torture survivors today.

The 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

This year, as the international community celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR70), the Board of Trustees of the Fund will stage a high-level public panel



entitled “Seeking Justice for Torture: a Victim-Centred Approach” to i) reflect on the Fund’s unique contribution to the enjoyment of human rights and ii) highlight the milestones in torture victims’ quest for justice achieved over the years as well as iii) the challenges which still lay ahead. Emblematic human rights defenders and victims of torture, who have paved the way through their courage, tenacity and vision – and with the indispensable support of the Fund – will share their stories and reflections. The public event will be followed by a closed workshop for approximately 30 representatives of civil society organizations from all regions to further exchange experiences and expertise, amongst each other and with the Fund’s Trustees, on ways to empower victims to obtain judicial remedy for torture.

High-Level Public Panel:

The high-level public panel will take place on **Wednesday, 11th April from 11:00 to 12:30 in Geneva, Switzerland, Palais des Nations Conference Room IX**. The event will be open to all Permanent Missions, civil society actors, rehabilitation practitioners, international experts and the media. Interpretation in English, French and Spanish will be provided. The Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture will moderate the panel comprised of the following renowned panellists:

- **Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights:**
- **Ms. Estela de Carlotto, Co-founder and President of Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo (Argentina):** the forty-year struggle to achieve truth and justice for children and grandchildren victims of enforced disappearance during the military dictatorship in Argentina.
- **H.E. Ambassador Carsten Staur, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations in Geneva:** the importance of international support for the rehabilitation of victims of torture, including through the work of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.
- **Mr. Hassan Bility, Journalist and Director of the Global Justice and Research Project (Liberia):** the international pursuit of justice and accountability for victims of war crimes during the Liberian civil war.
- **Mr. Jens Modvig, Chairperson of the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT):** the right to redress and an effective judicial remedy for victims of torture under article 14 of the United Nations Convention against Torture.
- **Mr. Rupert Skillbeck, Director, REDRESS (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland):** successes and challenges for securing remedies in domestic, regional and international courts or individuals and communities who have suffered torture in all regions of the world.

4th Annual Public Event on

Seeking Justice for Torture: a Victim-Centred Approach

11 April 2018

Palais des Nations, Geneva

Panellists' biographies

Kate Gilmore

UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights (Australia)



Ms. Gilmore was appointed United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights on 1st December 2015. She served as Assistant Secretary General and Deputy Executive Director for Programmes with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as well as National Director of Amnesty International Australia and Executive Deputy Secretary General of Amnesty International. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of New England and postgraduate degrees in Social Work from the University of Melbourne and Community Development from RMIT. She started her career as a social worker and government policy officer in Australia, where she helped establish the first Centre against Sexual Assault at Melbourne's Royal Women's Hospital.

Estela Barnes de Carlotto

President, Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo (Argentina)



Ms. Barnes de Carlotto is the President of *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*. She was a schoolteacher when, in 1977, her pregnant daughter Laura Estela Carlotto, was kidnapped by the military regime and disappeared. Laura's son was born in captivity and appropriated; she was then executed. Ms Barnes de Carlotto and other women began searching tirelessly for their disappeared children and grandchildren and in 1978 established *Abuelas*. An estimated 30,000 people were disappeared during the dictatorship, including some 500 children. To date, 127 of these children (now adults) have recovered their identity and many of those responsible are serving life sentences. In August 2014, Ms. Barnes de Carlotto was finally able to locate and reunite with her grandson through DNA matching. *Abuelas* is one of the first organizations supported by the UNVFVT, with a first grant in 1989.

H.E. Carsten Staur

Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN in Geneva



Ambassador Staur has served as Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN in Geneva since 2013 and in New York from 2007 to 2013. Amongst other responsibilities, he chaired UNHCR's Executive Committee (2015-16) and the drafting Committee of the 32nd International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference (2015). In 2013, he published the book "Shared Responsibility. The United Nations in the Age of Globalization". He has also served as State Secretary in the Foreign Ministry in charge of development cooperation (Danida) and as Under Secretary for Bilateral Development Cooperation, amongst others. He holds a degree in History and Literature from the University of Copenhagen.

Hassan Bility

Director, Global Justice and Research Project (Liberia)



Mr. Bility is a journalist and former prisoner of conscience during the Charles Taylor administration. He was arrested and jailed numerous times, enduring torture, for denouncing human rights abuses in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 2012, he founded the Global Justice and Research Project to seek accountability for war related crimes in Liberia. The organization’s work has led to the arrest of several prominent military commanders. Mr. Bility received the Amnesty International Human Rights Journalism Under Threat Award and The Center for Justice and Accountability's Judith Lee Stroonath Human Rights Awards. The Global Justice and Research Project is a partner of Civitas Maxima, a grantee of the UNVFVT.

Jens Modvig

Chairperson, UN Committee against Torture (CAT) (Denmark)



Mr. Modvig has been a member of the CAT since 2013 and serves as its current Chairperson. He earned his medical degree and a PhD in Public Health Epidemiology from the University of Copenhagen, where he currently serves as Clinical Associate Professor. He is also Chief Medical Officer at DIGNITY, the Danish Institute against Torture. He has also served as Director of the UN Office in Belgrade, Deputy Head of Mission in Kosovo and Secretary-General of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT). He has carried out more than 165 short-term missions to some 45 countries to support projects for the rehabilitation of torture victims, and has a number of publications on the issue.

Rupert Skillbeck

Director, REDRESS (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)



Mr. Skillbeck is the Director of REDRESS. He was previously the Litigation Director at the Open Society Justice Initiative, overseeing litigation in more than 100 cases including torture, deaths in custody, discrimination, fair trial rights, corruption, national security and international criminal law. He was also the Principal Defender for the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia; Director of the criminal defence section of the State Court in Sarajevo and; the Defence Advisor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. REDRESS seeks justice and reparation for survivors of torture and related international crimes, through litigation, advocacy and capacity-building. Priority in decisions and interventions is given to promoting survivors’ well-being and preventing further traumatisation. REDRESS is a long-time grantee of the Fund.