FROM HORROR
TO HEALING

26 JUNE INTERNATIONAL DAY IN SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE

2016

UNITED NATIONS FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE
Torture still endemic

Torture still exists and victims of torture are in all regions of the world. A shocking number of people even favour its use. On 26 June, we stand together to honour the victims of torture and renew our commitment for a world without torture.

No circumstances ever justify the use of torture or other forms of cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment.

Providing assistance to victims of torture is not charity; it is the law. Article 14 of the Convention Against Torture stipulates the obligation of States to ensure that a victim of torture under their jurisdiction obtains redress, including the means for as full rehabilitation as possible.

Torture’s pervasive consequences often go beyond the isolated act on an individual. The trauma of torture can be transmitted through generations and lead to cycles of violence.

Recovering from torture is possible. It requires prompt and specialized programmes. The path from horror to healing relies on the expertise and dedication of doctors, lawyers, therapists and social workers. Their daily work with victims of torture, including children and adolescents, is made possible with the support of the UN Fund for Victims of Torture.

Gaby Oré Aguilar
Chairperson, Board of Trustees of the UN Fund for Victims of Torture
Why 26 June?

26 June marks the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The day is an opportunity to call on all stakeholders including UN Member States, civil society and individuals everywhere to unite in support of the hundreds of thousands of people around the world who have been victims of torture and those who are still tortured today.

26 June is the day in 1987 when the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, one of the key instruments in fighting torture, came into effect. Today, the Convention is ratified by 159 UN Member States. This year, 2016, also marks the 35th anniversary of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, a unique victim-focused mechanism that channels funding for the assistance to victims of torture and their families.
Message of the UN Secretary General

Around the world, in every region, men, women and children are still being tortured by non-State actors and under direct State policy. Despite its absolute prohibition under international law, this dehumanizing practice remains pervasive and, most disturbingly, is even gaining acceptance.

The law is crystal clear: torture can never be used at any time or under any circumstances, including during conflict or when national security is under threat. On this International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, we express our solidarity with and support for the hundreds of thousands of victims of torture and their family members throughout the world.

The Convention Against Torture, ratified to date by 159 UN State Parties, stipulates that States have to ensure that a victim of torture under their jurisdiction obtains redress, including the means for as full rehabilitation as is possible. When States neglect their obligation to prevent torture, and fail to provide torture victims with effective and prompt redress, compensation and appropriate forms of rehabilitation, the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture is a lifeline of last resort. Established by the UN General Assembly 35 years ago, the Fund supports hundreds of organizations that provide legal, social, psychological and medical assistance to some 50,000 victims every year.

The Fund requires a minimum of US $12 million in annual voluntary contributions. I strongly urge States to stand by victims by supporting this UN Fund, and to remain fully engaged in the fight against torture and impunity. Assisting victims of torture and stopping this crime will benefit whole societies and help provide a future of safety and dignity for all.

Ban Ki-moon
UN Secretary General
26 June 2016
“Take one member of society, torture him, send him back to the society, it is as if you have tortured the entire society.”

Medical Service Provider, Iraq
Message of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Victims of torture come from many walks of life. They are in all countries. They may be human rights defenders, migrants, journalists, persons with disabilities, indigenous people or members of minority groups or people from the LGBT community.

Children, too, may be tortured – whether to obtain information, or to put pressure on their parents and communities. The work of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture indicates that today the number of children victim of torture is rising. In 2016, 5,279 child and adolescent victims of torture are estimated to be given assistance by organizations funded by the UN Fund, which represents a 35% compared to 2015.

In addition, a shockingly high number of child migrants and refugees suffer detention at borders, and may suffer very harsh physical and psychological abuse in detention by agents of the State.

Twenty-nine years ago, the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment became law. Today, it is ratified by 159 States. It prohibits unreservedly the intentional infliction of severe pain, physical or mental, to obtain information, to punish for perceived crimes, or to put pressure on the victim or other parties.

Torture is a severe violation of human rights that can never be justified – even during wartime, or when national security is under threat. Article 14 of the Convention further commits States to ensuring that all victims of torture under their jurisdiction obtain redress, and to the extent possible, rehabilitation.

When States fail to care adequately for these and other victims, the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture steps in to help them obtain rehabilitation and redress. The Fund, which is operated by my Office and this year marks its 35th year of helping victims, has provided over US$ 180 million to more than 630 organizations worldwide.

In 2016 alone the Fund will finance 178 projects with US $7.1 million, helping more than 47,000 victims in over 81 countries regain their dignity.

Every victim matters. Helping the Fund provide specialized rehabilitation to these men, women and children is one very real way that each of us can make a difference. And it is a concrete manifestation of the commitment towards the elimination of torture.

Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
26 June 2016
The UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, administered by the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva, serves as a unique bridge between victims, practitioners and UN Member States in the field of redress and rehabilitation of victims of torture.

In 2016 alone, the UN Fund is providing funding of US$7.1 million to 178 projects that will assist over 50,000 victims, both adults and children, in over 81 countries.

On 26 June as on every day, the UN Fund stands by the victims around the world. This day is to honour them, and the many dedicated professionals that put their expertise at the service of those who have endured this gross violation of human rights.
The work supported by the UN Fund for Victims of Torture

Provisioning an emergency response to humanitarian crises

IAN International Aid Network Serbia, UN Torture Fund grantee, provides psychosocial and medical assistance to Syrian and Iraqi victims of torture fleeing conflict

Pathologists conducting an exhumation
IMLU, Kenya, UN Torture Fund grantee in 2014
The work supported by the UN Fund for Victims of Torture

Children in group therapy VIVE ZENE, Bosnia & Herzegovina
UN Torture Fund grantee
“When they came to get me, I was shaking terribly and my heart kept beating so fast. That was the first day of three years I was kept in abduction. During that time, I had to see so many terrible things, people being tortured and killed.”

“I was forced to witness the killings of people with a panga (machete) when they had tried to escape, when they were just too weak or for no obvious reason at all. One time I had to watch many people being burnt alive in a hut.”

“I also experienced torture myself. Once when I was walking too slowly, I was called aside with another girl, then two rebels were called to come and beat us. At that point I thought they would even kill us. They beat us until my friend was not able to say a word anymore. The whole of my body was swollen. They left us to lie there in pain.”

UNITED NATIONS FUND FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE
The healing community

“It is a blessing to be a part of someone’s healing, in particular that of a child who is recuperating and regaining their life after experiencing torture; including by helping them to diminish their symptoms and enabling them to tell their story.”

Ms. Anette Carnemalm, Head of Treatment Center for Persons Affected by War and Torture in Malmö, Swedish Red Cross

“Torture is intentionally kept secret. As a result, the acknowledgment of torture by society, governments and perpetrators is an incredibly important part of the healing process for survivors, in particular children.”

Ms. Susannah Sirkin, Director of International Policy & Partnerships/Senior Advisor, Physicians for Human Rights, United States of America

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