



Joint press release

Geneva, 16 June 2016

“Why we should invest in rehabilitating victims of torture”

Hundreds of thousands of persons worldwide are or have been subject to torture - in prisons, police stations, detention centres or elsewhere, in public or in secret. Torture is a crime that can never be justified, whether as a means to fight terrorism or protect national security, or for any other reason. Yet, torture continues to happen, despite the strong international legal and political framework which exists to prevent it. Preventing acts of torture is crucial, but equally important is the rehabilitation of victims. It is on this premise that on 16 June 2016 the EU Delegation to the UN in Geneva, South Africa and Denmark, supported by the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, organized a high-level panel discussion at the Palais des Nations in Geneva which made a clear case for redress and rehabilitation of victims of torture.

The event was organized as a follow up to the 3rd EU-South Africa Human Rights Dialogue which took place in December 2015 in Pretoria, where both sides agreed to work in partnership and organise joint side events in areas of mutual concern and interest, and in this regard proposed to mark the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture in June 2016.

Article 14 of the UN Convention against Torture, ratified today by 159 countries, stipulates that States must ensure that a victim of torture under their jurisdiction obtains redress. But rehabilitation is more than a legal obligation under international law, it is a necessary element for well-functioning societies. Torture affects not only the victim but also his/her family and community; failure to provide effective rehabilitation can threaten societies as a whole. Yet, the obligation to provide rehabilitation for torture victims is too often neglected or not adequately implemented, be it due to lack of political will, financial resources or necessary skills. Too often, the burden of rehabilitation of victims lies solely with NGOs.

In his introduction, **Ambassador Carsten Staur, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN in Geneva** underlined: *"Supporting victims of torture is a longstanding commitment - for all of us."* He continued to establish that *"Rehabilitation is not charity. It is a legal obligation of States."*

The **EU Special Representative for Human Rights Stavros Lambrinidis** added: *"In my work as EU Special Representative for Human Rights, I regularly meet men and women from around the world who have been tortured or subjected to cruel or inhuman treatment and punishment for their work for human rights. This can never be acceptable. The EU will continue to send a strong, clear message: torture is an unequivocal crime under international law that can never be justified."*

"On 16 June we remember in South Africa the children who sacrificed their lives to give impetus to the struggle against apartheid. Our commitment to the Convention against Torture comes out of our deep commitment to our common humanity. This is why democratic South Africa, following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established to address among other atrocities the use of systematic torture by the apartheid regime, prioritized the accession and ratification of this Convention," emphasized **Ambassador Nozipho Mxakato-Diseko, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the UN in Geneva.**

Mikolaj Pietrzak, Member of the Board of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, added: *"The work of the Fund and its partners show that life after torture is possible, but rehabilitation and redress has to be timely and adequately provided. Un-addressed trauma induced by torture, in particular on children and adolescents, may have life-long consequences in terms of physical, psychological and social development, that are felt beyond the individual onto families, communities and society as a whole."*