

Civil Society United Against Torture

The prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman and or degrading treatment or punishment is absolute. Torture cannot be accepted or tolerated under any circumstance. Yet we are at a juncture where increasing insecurity including through violent acts of terrorism and organized crime, the rise of populism and extremist parties, and the changing global discourse as a result of refugee and immigrant flows are paving the way for questioning the fundamental values and principles embedded in the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. Moreover, certain groups including women, children, Indigenous peoples, and people on the move, remain particularly vulnerable to torture as their plight remains by and large ignored despite the existence of their international rights to obtain protection and reparation.

Those challenges can only be tackled and overcome through a comprehensive approach, by supporting and standing with the women and men operating at the frontlines, including victims, human rights defenders and grassroots organisations – the driving forces in the fight against torture and impunity. The OMCT and its global SOS-Torture Network has – for more than 30 years – grown precisely on the basis of this understanding. We foster local anti-torture civil society organisations (CSOs), encourage them to form coalitions, and engage them in all areas of anti-torture work: prevention, protection, rehabilitation, justice, accountability, research, and standard-setting, always working in solidarity and accompaniment with victims, families, their communities, and human rights defenders. We have therefore succeeded in supporting a human rights movement that has never been more global than it is today.

Uniting the global anti-torture movement, a collective response against torture

Now, with generous, committed support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and the European Union, the OMCT is launching a new world-wide initiative for 2018-2020, “*Civil Society United Against Torture*,” designed as a holistic response to the three main needs we see in the global anti-torture movement:

- **Strategy 1:** Mobilization of CSOs around the world demanding compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture – coordinating local CSOs in 45 countries to engage with the Committee Against Torture, and providing support and accompanying CSOs in 15 focus countries to make advances on torture protection, prevention, and reparation for victims.
- **Strategy 2:** Building regional litigation groups in the OMCT Network to reinforce litigation by sharing experiences in documentation and bringing cases before domestic and international tribunals, and to help victims and their lawyers to launch and win cases against torture.
- **Strategy 3:** Setting up international and regional action groups in our Network to undertake collective research studies to strengthen the protection of groups especially vulnerable to torture and abuse – migrants, women, children, and indigenous peoples – through deepening the knowledge of the causes and consequences of their vulnerability – and to protect against erosion of the anti-torture infrastructure resulting from national security discourses.

What we want to achieve

1. **Strong and relevant international recommendations, and enhanced implementation by States.** With support from this project, CSOs from all regions will have engaged their authorities through the UN Committee Against Torture and achieved implementation of key recommendations back home in their ongoing struggles against torture.
2. **Increased litigation in torture cases and winning more cases for victims.** Three regional litigators’ groups – in Africa, Asia, and Latin America – will have been established, and brought together in regional trainings. The members of the groups will have begun or undertaken litigation on behalf of torture victims and families and victims, and their families will have received medical, legal, and social assistance.
3. **Extensive research on vulnerability, and corrosive national security discourses, for developing new protection standards.** At the end of this project, we will have collectively conducted and published four comprehensive, first-time regional reports on sectors most vulnerable to torture – women, indigenous peoples, migrants, and children – and will invest in collective advocacy by CSOs against pro-torture national security discourses and to secure new measures and remedies identified to protect those vulnerable to torture and CIDT.

Focus Countries

This initiative is global, and includes work on over 40 countries, as well as exchanges at the regional levels; but it also includes specific and sustained work in nine focus countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, Mexico, Honduras, Togo, and Ivory Coast. Further, the initiative has the flexibility to address at least six other challenging country contexts, working as a civil society mobilizer with the Committee Against Torture to coordinate and engage CSOs to address long-overdue or non-reporting States.

Regional Implementing Partners

The OMCT is implementing “Civil Society United Against Torture” together with three key regional partners – in Asia with **PAHRA**, the Philippines Alliance for Human Rights Advocates (<https://philippinehumanrights.org>), in Africa with **CACIT**, the Collectif des Associations Contre l’Impunité au Togo (<http://www.cacit.org>), and in Latin America with **Frayba**, the Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas A.C. (<https://frayba.org.mx>). Each of them are long-standing partners of the OMCT and members of the OMCT-SOS Torture Network, have combatted torture and ill-treatment in their own countries for years, and bring with them a rich and diverse expertise in the areas of advocacy, litigation, vulnerable populations, and regional network- and coalition-building.

Timeframe

36 months during the years 2017 – 2020.

Budget

1.8 million CHF

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