



2008 SOCIAL FORUM OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL:
QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN THE CONTEXT
OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Around the world, poverty and discrimination fuel torture and other
forms of violence

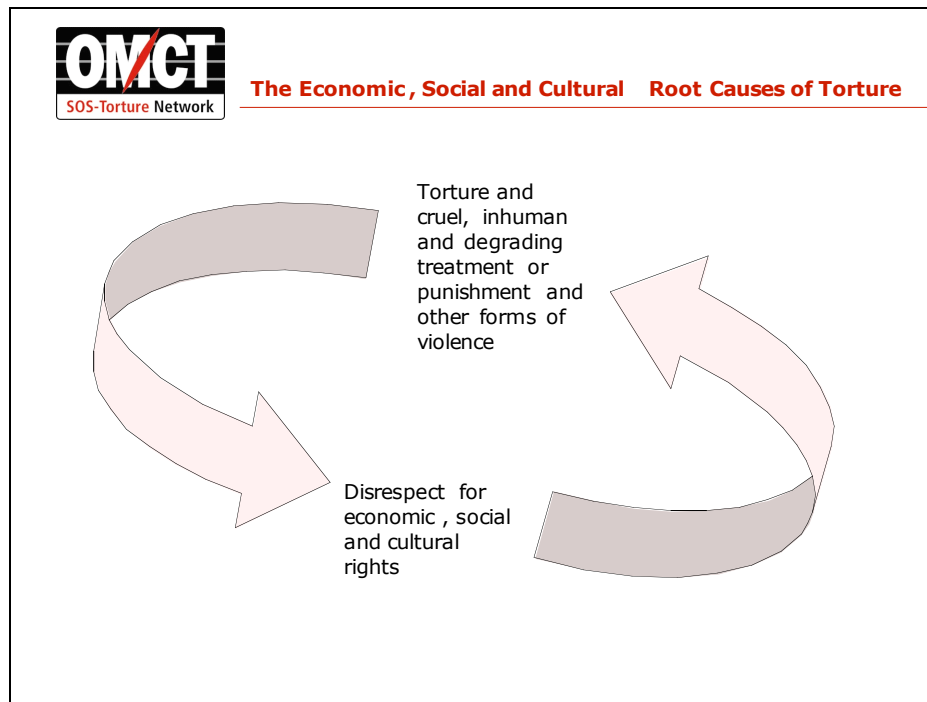


Figure 1: the relationship between poverty and violence is mutually reinforcing

All too often, torture and poverty go hand in hand. The experience of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) shows that, around the world, the majority of victims of torture and other forms of violence come from the most disadvantaged social groups, including those living in extreme poverty. Members of marginalised communities are not only more vulnerable to such abuses, they are also least able to claim their rights and seek protection and redress. Supporting the victims of torture therefore means giving voice to the poor, women and children, indigenous communities, ethnic, racial and religious minorities and all those forced to live on the margins of society.

In some cases, acts of torture and violence are carried out by states themselves in an attempt to suppress public protest against socio-economic policies that exacerbate poverty or to silence those who seek to defend economic, social and cultural rights. In others, they are used to remove opposition to major infrastructure projects, the establishment of special economic zones, clearance of informal settlements or the exploitation of natural resources. Frequently those who oppose such projects are those with most to lose – the poorest and most vulnerable communities. And more and more, the poor experience violence at the hands of non-state

actors such as paramilitary and guerrilla groups, organised criminal gangs, private individuals or security companies protecting economic interests – including those of multinational corporations engaged in mining and agri-industrial activities.

The relationship between poverty and violence is a mutually reinforcing one (see figure 1). If, therefore, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other forms of violence are to be eliminated, then their economic, social and cultural root causes must be, first, understood and, secondly, effectively addressed. The converse equally applies: acting to reduce levels of violence in a given society is a fundamental step toward ensuring the widespread enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. Around the world, conflict and lack of security expose citizens to situations that severely impede their possibility of escaping from poverty, of working in just and favourable conditions, of providing care and education to their children and of enjoying an adequate standard of living and the highest attainable standard of health.

Of particular concern is the widening economic gap between the richest and poorest citizens in many developing countries, and the heightened social tensions that are a clear consequence. Rising global food prices and increasing food insecurity are only likely to exacerbate this situation. In this context it is imperative that governments recognise and respect the right of their citizens to peaceful demonstration. Meeting unrest generated by deteriorating living standards with violent repression only heightens social tensions and creates a context for further violence. Other phenomena that both contribute to poverty and increase the levels of violence in so society include the deterioration of social fabric, growing income gaps, weakening of the State's regulatory capacity, and the repression of manifestations of linguistic, cultural or religious identity.

A human rights-based approach to the eradication of poverty must necessarily address the link between the denial of economic, social and cultural rights and the prevalence of violence, and OMCT encourages this dimension to be taken into account in the context of the 2008 Social Forum.

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