



WORLD ORGANISATION AGAINST TORTURE (OMCT)

PRESS RELEASE

International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

The absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment must now become a reality!

Geneva, 26th of June 2011. On the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and its SOS-Torture Network are joining together on the International Campaign for the Absolute Prohibition of Torture and Ill-treatment to denounce current attempts by some Governments to erode the absolute legal prohibition of torture, and to strongly reaffirm, on this day dedicated to the victims of torture and ill-treatment, that respect for human dignity means that such practices are forbidden under all circumstances.

On the 15th of June 2011, the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights dedicated a public hearing to the OMCT to mark the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture that will take place on the 26th of June, during which Mr. Eric Sottas, OMCT Secretary General, and Ms. Hina Jilani, Former Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders, human rights lawyer and founding member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), were invited to speak.

«More than 20 years after the entry into force of the Convention against Torture, an increasing number of governments are allowing the practice of torture to spread, and public opinion appears to tolerate the practice», recalled Ms. Heidi Hautala (Greens/EFA, FI), Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, at the opening of the hearing.

«During the first decade of this century, we have witnessed a change in discourse within democracies in relation to the use of torture and particularly of ill-treatment», stressed Mr. Eric Sottas.

Serious human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment, have been and are still today perpetrated with almost total impunity, within the framework of the « war against terrorism » and/or in the name of national security.

Moreover, too often, public opinions, who are supposed to ensure greater respect for human rights, have allowed themselves to be persuaded to tolerate practices tantamount to torture and ill-treatment.

«It is urgent to mobilise all political stakeholders, as well as judges and the public opinion, to avoid that the drifts that were observed undermine the principles and safeguards entailed in the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and in other related international instruments», recalled Mr. Eric Sottas during the hearing.

In the opinion of Ms. Hina Jilani, another alarming trend is the military response to terrorism - through practices such as incommunicado and secret detention, or forced disappearances, which are potentially allowing torture insofar as they cannot be denounced or proven. This militarisation and the expanded role of intelligence services in countering terrorism have lead to «parallel systems of justice, with very limited judicial and civil scrutiny», said Ms. Jilani.

Moreover, according to Ms. Jilani, in most countries "there is no legal basis for the transfer to secret services of power to interrogate and detain", which *de facto* guarantee the immunity of the perpetrators, who cannot be easily identified or hold legally accountable for secret acts.

Regarding secret services, Mr. Eric Sottas replied: «We need to ensure an effective control on intelligence services. Clear standards need to be established and internationally adopted in order to regulate the obligations of the security services, particularly regarding the use of information. It is not enough to prohibit the use of information that are known to have been possibly obtained under torture. It is also fundamental to ensure that each intelligence service investigates on sources who are providing information to them and in making sure that these information have not been obtained under torture.»

It is in this perspective that the OMCT has decided to launch a Campaign for the Absolute Prohibition of Torture and Ill-treatment, notably through the Manifesto entitled "Nothing can justify torture under any circumstances", which has already been signed by more than 2,000 signatories, including ten laureates of the Nobel Prize. In order to raise awareness and mobilise public opinions all over the world against such practices, members of the SOS-Torture Network will organise specific activities on the 26th of June that will be published on OMCT's website.

Indeed, the 26th of June should not only serve to remind States of their obligations to respect and guarantee the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, but it also should remind the public at large to mobilise in order to denounce such practices.

Finally, on this day dedicated to the victims of torture and ill-treatment, OMCT also wishes to recall that, too often, the victims fail to obtain justice and reparation. Yet, both are instrumental in the restoration of victims' dignity.

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For further information on OMCT's Campaign:

"Nothing can justify torture under any circumstances"

www.omct.org/international-campaigns/campaign-prohibition-torture/manifesto/