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**Human Rights Council**

**Thirty-first session**

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture**

**Report of the Secretary-General**

*Summary*

The present report, which complements the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture submitted to the General Assembly at its seventieth session (A/70/223), provides information on the activities of the Fund and describes in particular the recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund at its forty-second session, held in Geneva from 28 September to 2 October 2015.

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## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Submission of the report**

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/156 and complements the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (A/70/223), which was submitted to the Assembly at its seventieth session. It contains updated information on the activities of the Fund, in particular the recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund at its forty-second session, held in Geneva from 28 September to 2 October 2015.

### **B. Mandate of the Fund**

2. The Fund receives voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals. In accordance with the mandate of the Fund outlined in General Assembly resolution 36/151 and the practices established by the Board of Trustees since 1982, the Fund provides grants to established channels of assistance, including non-governmental organizations, associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms that submit project proposals aimed at the provision of medical, psychological, social, financial, legal and humanitarian or other forms of assistance to victims of torture and members of their families.

### **C. Administration of the Fund and composition of the Board of Trustees**

3. The Secretary-General administers the Fund through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with the advice of the Board of Trustees, which is composed of five members who act in their personal capacity and are appointed by the Secretary-General with due regard to the principle of equitable geographical distribution and in consultation with their Governments. The Board is currently composed of Maria Cristina de Mendonça (Portugal), Morad el-Shazly (Egypt), Anastasia Pinto (India) and Gaby Oré Aguilar (Peru). Adam Bodnar (Poland), Chair of the Board in 2015, resigned on 15 October 2015 owing to other professional commitments.

## **II. Management of grants**

### **A. Admissibility criteria**

4. Project admissibility criteria are outlined in the guidelines of the Fund. The guidelines require a project proposal to be presented by an established channel of assistance, including non-governmental organizations, associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms. The beneficiaries must be victims of torture and/or their family members. Priority is given to projects providing direct assistance to torture victims, which may consist of medical or psychological assistance, help with social or financial reintegration as well as various forms of legal assistance for victims or members of their families, including assistance in seeking redress or applying for asylum. As a general rule, projects are supported on a yearly basis for a maximum of 10 years, subject to a satisfactory evaluation of the project and

availability of funds. Depending on the resources available, the Fund may also finance projects to organize training programmes, seminars or conferences to allow health-care professionals or other service providers to exchange best practices. Grant requests for projects involving investigation, research, studies, publications or other similar activities are not admissible.

5. Outside of the regular grants cycle, the Fund can also provide emergency assistance to project proposals submitted through the emergency intersessional procedure, outlined in the guidelines for the Fund. Emergency grants may be awarded in exceptional circumstances such as a sudden increase in the number of victims of torture to be assisted due to a humanitarian crisis, including armed conflict, wars and natural disasters, subject to availability of funds. Emergency grants may also be awarded when such crisis results in a grave situation that makes it impossible for an organization to continue to provide assistance to beneficiaries (e.g. destruction of premises or offices), for the purpose of enabling the organization to resume its activities.

#### **B. Monitoring and evaluation of grants**

6. As a rule, pre-screening visits to projects are undertaken before a grant is awarded to a new project proposal. Regular monitoring visits to ongoing projects are also scheduled to assess the implementation of the projects funded. An internal guide on conducting visits to projects that have been funded or are to be funded was developed in 2013 by the secretariat of the Fund to enhance verification methodology and ensure coherence in the evaluation process. In 2015, a total of 75 projects were visited: 32 visits were conducted by the secretariat of the Fund, 33 by OHCHR field presences and 10 by members of the Board.

### **III. Financial situation of the Fund**

7. The Board holds the firm view that a more satisfactory level of contributions from donors is needed to respond to the current realities of victims of torture and their family members worldwide. The Board reiterates that contributing to the Fund is a concrete expression of the commitment of States to the elimination of torture.

8. The table below shows the contributions and pledges received in 2015 as of the time of writing. As at the forty-second session of the Board, at which grants were recommended for 2016, the Fund had available a net total of US\$ 8,168,776 available for grants to be disbursed in 2016.

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**Contributions and pledges received from 1 January to 8 December 2015**


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<i>Donor</i>	<i>Amount (United States dollars)</i>	<i>Date of receipt</i>
<b>State</b>		
Andorra	10 928.96	20 August 2015
Austria	28 058.36	1 October 2015
Chile	20 000.00	19 March 2015
Denmark	456 760.05	6 February 2015
Finland	220 994.48	21 July 2015
Germany	583 244.96	24 March 2015
Germany	179 894.18	7 December 2015
India	25 000.00	26 January 2015
Ireland	146 262.19	28 April 2015
Italy	31 746.03	7 December 2015
Kuwait	10 000.00	24 February 2015
Liechtenstein	24 900.40	24 March 2015
Luxembourg	10 834.24	27 April 2015
Mexico	10 000.00	15 November 2015
Morocco	4 000.00	27 April 2015
Netherlands	30 00.000	16 November 2015
Norway	107 226.23	27 April 2015
Peru	1 541.66	26 June 2015
South Africa	8 087.63	30 March 2015
United Arab Emirates	10 000.00	20 August 2015
Holy See	2 000.00	7 November 2015
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>1 921 479.37</b>	
<b>Individual donors</b>		
Nederlands Juristen Comité voor de Mensenrechten	5 025.00	27 April 2015
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>5 025.00</b>	
<b>Total contributions</b>	<b>1 926 504.37</b>	
<b>Pledges</b>		
France	54 264.61	8 December 2015
United States of America	6 500 000.00	28 November 2015
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	508 500.00	11 September 2015
<b>Total pledges</b>	<b>7 062 764.61</b>	
<b>Total contributions and pledges</b>	<b>8 989 268.98</b>	

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#### IV. Forty-second session of the Board of Trustees

9. The forty-second session of the Board was held in Geneva from 28 September to 2 October 2015. The Board examined applications for funding and made recommendations on grants to be awarded to beneficiary organizations for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2016.
10. The amount available for distribution to projects was calculated after deducting programme support costs, the operating cash reserve and the expenditure for non-grant activities from the total amount of contributions received since the fortieth session of the Board, held from 29 September to 3 October 2014.
11. At the forty-second session, the Board, with the assistance of the secretariat, reviewed a total of 221 admissible project applications aimed at providing direct assistance to victims of torture and their family members, amounting to a total request of \$13,127,708.
12. The Board considered positively a total of 178 projects to be implemented in 81 countries for a total amount of \$7,169,300. Notably, it recommended for a renewed grant 150 ongoing projects and 24 new projects aimed at providing direct assistance to victims and four grants for new training and seminar projects. With this vital financial assistance, it is expected that 47,000 victims and their families will obtain rehabilitation services in all regions of the world in the course of 2016.
13. All project proposals were reviewed on a competitive basis, taking into account the merit and documented needs as well as the number of years of continuous support by the Fund to the same project.
14. The Board also recommended setting aside an additional \$1 million to respond to emergency assistance requests that may be received in 2016 through the intersessional procedure of the Fund.
15. Through its enhanced emergency procedure, in 2015 the Fund was able to provide rapid financial support in the amount of \$400,000 for the relief of victims of torture in the context of unfolding crisis. Emergency grants were awarded to provide vital rehabilitation services in Ukraine for victims displaced from the eastern regions of the country, in northern Iraq and Jordan for the relief of Syrian and Iraqi victims, in Burundi to support victims of unfolding political violence as well as in Serbia and Hungary in the context of the increased influx of refugees to those countries.
16. In the face of these emergency requests, the Board remains concerned about the upsurge in torture, in particular in the context of violent extremism and unprecedented levels of forced displacement worldwide, and recalls that States have the obligation under international law to provide redress and rehabilitation to victims of torture.
17. The Board also recommended that, for the 2017 call for applications, special attention should be given to projects focusing on (a) early identification of victims of torture and their access to medical, legal, social, psychological services; (b) innovative strategic litigation initiatives; (c) victims of torture in territories controlled by non-State actors; (d) rehabilitation for women and children who are victims of torture; and (e) initiatives operating in contexts of restricted civil society space. Moreover, for the 2017 call for applications the Board identified as priorities countries in the Middle East and North Africa; countries that are members of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (in particular Brazil); and Central Asia.
18. During the forty-second session, the Board also met with Alessio Bruni, member of the Committee against Torture, as part of its regular inter-mechanism dialogue and Martha

Mendez of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights of the European Commission to share information on grant-making in the field of the fight against torture.

19. The Board also made policy-related recommendations, later endorsed by the High Commissioner. Recalling its desire to make the Fund a platform for knowledge-sharing and expertise, the Board recommended that the secretariat organize a thematic workshop at its forty-third session (April 2016), to which selected experts and practitioners would be invited to present their research and experience. The workshop would focus on the consequences of torture on children and the prevention of inter-generational transmission of trauma. The first workshop of this kind, an expert workshop of practitioners on redress and rehabilitation for victims of torture in emergency contexts and long-term needs of victims, was convened by the Board at its forty-first session (April 2015) (see A/70/223).

20. In 2016, the Fund will also celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of its establishment by the General Assembly. In coordination with the OHCHR Communications Section, the Board agreed to launch a campaign to draw public attention to the plight of victims of torture as well as to galvanize support for this essential victim-centred mechanism. For this important occasion, the Fund will urge renewed support in the form of voluntary contributions from Member States and private donors.

## V. Making a contribution

21. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities can contribute to the Fund. It is important to note that only specifically earmarked contributions are attributed to the Fund. For more information on how to contribute and details about the Fund, donors are requested to contact the secretariat of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland; e-mail: unvfvf@ohchr.org; telephone: +41 22 917 9624; fax: +41 22 917 9017.

## VI. Conclusions and recommendations

22. **The complexity of contexts and crises in which torture takes place has grown in recent years, resulting in an increase in the practice of torture and the number of victims every year. The need for redress and rehabilitation has become more pressing than ever.**

23. **As the Secretary-General noted in his statement of 26 June 2015 on the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture channels vital funding to centres assisting victims of torture. It is a practical tool of the United Nations to extend prompt assistance to victims of torture and members of their families. Seeking to provide redress, including rehabilitation, to tens of thousands of victims of torture every year in all regions of the world, the Fund is an integral part of the work of the United Nations against torture.**

24. **For the second year in a row, the Board has set aside funding for emergency applications, to be received through the intersessional emergency procedure of the Fund, in order to respond rapidly to new and emergency requests for assistance, in particular in the context of unfolding humanitarian crises.**

25. **The Board also holds the view that in light of the increasing challenges described above, there is a need to facilitate knowledge-sharing among rehabilitation practitioners. The Fund should serve as a platform for sharing expertise in this field through the holding of annual thematic workshops.**

26. The Board estimates that the Fund would need to receive \$12 million (against the present annual income of almost \$9 million) on a yearly basis to respond adequately to the ever-increasing demands for assistance, in particular in the face of today's large-scale human rights crises and conflicts. The Secretary-General appeals to Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to the Fund, noting its upcoming thirty-fifth anniversary in 2016.

27. The Secretary-General and the Board stress that contributing to the Fund is a concrete manifestation of the commitment of States to the elimination of torture, in line with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, in particular its article 14.

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