

As delivered



United Nations Fund for Victims of Torture

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Office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

10th Anniversary of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture

Panel 2: A cooperative triangular relationship: challenges and way forward

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Dear Chairperson,

Distinguished Guests,

The UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the first UN anti-torture mechanism established back in 1981, adds its voice to those that today recalled the remarkable and institutional advances achieved in the prevention and eradication of torture over the last 35 years, and extends its congratulations to the Subcommittee for this high-level commemorative event. But it is also compelled to agree with the observation done by many that torture is still rampant in all regional of the world. Victims come from all walks of life, as observed by the UN Voluntary Fund. Men, women, a growing number of children, indigenous people and minorities, people with disabilities, the LGBTI community, human rights defenders, migrants, asylum seekers, political opponents and journalists. Increasingly, they are subject to abuses along migration routes.

Moreover, we are witnessing a growing narrative favouring, condoning and even inciting the use of torture. From the observatory viewpoint of the Fund, the number of victims worldwide is far from decreasing. For 2017, the Fund has received requests for assistance from over 85,000 victims and their families amounting to more than US\$ 15 million. In the fact of that, through its net available US\$ 7,110,000 million, the Fund, through its civil society grant partners, is expected to provide rehabilitation, empowerment and reintegration to almost 50,000 victims of torture in 80 countries next year.

In answering to the question placed to this Panel, these very numbers represent - in the Fund's view - our main challenge for the future. The question back is therefore **“How should we take our collective work forward, including on the preventive front, to effectively reduce these figures”?**

Here are 3 areas of suggestions from the standpoint of the UN Fund:

- While continuing to refine standard-setting and advocate for universal ratification of international instruments, we need strategies aimed at the prevention and eradication of torture that are conceived and operationalized more squarely upon a **victim-centred perspective**.

Concretely, this would mean including the narrative of victims of torture in the development of programmes and policies aimed at both preventing and addressing torture. The victims' perspective, if taken into account, provides for a more sound basis, in particular as it would always prioritize the need for non-recurrence. Rehabilitated victims often become agents of change. National Preventive Mechanisms should draw more systematically from the experience of victims and embrace their narrative.

- Also, all UN mechanisms should continue to work more closely as a cohesive anti-torture front. Prevention and assistance to victims are two sides of the same coin. As noted by the Committee against Torture in its General Comment on Article 14 of the Convention, the provision of reparation to victims has an inherent preventive and deterrent effect in relation to future violations. It should therefore be supported rather than hampered, as it is regrettably the case in many parts of the world. In coordination with State-provided services, or in the total absence of those, many civil society organizations financially supported by the UN Fund for Victims of Torture assist victims in claiming their right to redress, including the right to truth. Thanks to their expertise, victims heal, regain their dignity and are able to embark on claiming redress for the harm caused; as a consequence, perpetrators are held accountable and critical jurisprudence is often adopted. National Preventive Mechanism should be working in more proximity to these realities.
- Effective prevention of torture starts with the professional ability to identify victims of torture. Identification and documentation of torture based, among others, on the *Istanbul Protocol* is instrumental for the adoption of an integrated approach to rehabilitation. Many of the Fund's awarded projects have developed over the years the skills to identify and document torture. Many, including rehabilitation centres and medical facilities, already cooperate with National Preventive Mechanisms. More should be done in the future to facilitate the sharing of know-how and specialized skills for the identification and documentation of torture. The UN Fund, through its annual Expert Workshops, facilitates knowledge-sharing and will continue to associate the Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture and other mechanisms.

In conclusion, victims are and should be increasingly at the centre of all interventions. Victims should be seen as a resource and those who deliver specialized services to them should be increasingly included in the development of preventive programmes and initiatives. National anti-torture programmes should encompass all components of the anti-torture 'cycle': legislative reforms, preventive programmes and assistance to victims. As there cannot be effective prevention of future victims without pursuing accountability for past violations; there could be no sustainable rehabilitation services for victims without guarantees of non-recurrence.

I thank you.
