



Joint Statement on the Occasion of the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

26 June 2008

Six United Nations entities regularly involved with issues relating to the prevention of torture and helping its victims have said that, despite a strong international legal framework outlawing torture, much remains to be done “to ensure that everybody is free of this scourge,” and urged that special attention be paid to ensure better protection for women.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights joins in with the following human rights entities and experts on the statement marking the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

The other five signatories of the statement are: The United Nations Committee against Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture; the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its cause and consequences; and the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

“2008 is the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundation of international human rights law, which in Article 5 states that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Successive human rights treaties have built on this provision. However, despite the comprehensive legal framework to confront torture, six decades after the Universal Declaration much remains to be done to ensure that everybody is free of this scourge.

“The adoption of the Universal Declaration sent a clear and unequivocal message – that dignity and justice were for all, including of course for women. Sixty years on, we call upon States to reaffirm their resolve to ensure that the torture protection framework is applied in a gender-sensitive manner, to help to end violence against women; to ensure that mechanisms and targeted efforts are put in place to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women; and to provide full access to justice and effective remedies, including health services and rehabilitation for the harm they have suffered.

“Women fall victim to torture in different ways, as highlighted by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s global campaign to end violence against women, launched in February 2008, and by other recent initiatives concerning violence against women, such as United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict. Certain forms of gender-specific violence perpetrated by State actors, as well as by private individuals or organizations, clearly amount to torture, and it is now recognized that gender-specific violence falls within the definition of torture in the Convention against Torture. The global campaign to end violence against women, when viewed through the prism of the international legal framework

prohibiting torture, can be strengthened: there needs to be a broader scope of prevention, protection, justice and reparation for victims, including access to international assistance, than currently exists.

“Women deprived of their liberty are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, which often carries with it a strong stigma exacerbating the suffering stemming from the violent acts. Female detainees also have a number of special needs and face specific challenges that must be taken into account in all protection and prevention efforts.

“Persons with disabilities have also often found themselves excluded from the protection afforded under international instruments. Therefore the entry into force, on 3 May 2008, of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol is particularly welcome. The Convention not only reaffirms the right of all to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman, degrading treatment or punishment, but requires States parties to take all effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent persons with disabilities from being subjected to these repellent practices.

“On this International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, we again pay tribute to all Governments, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and individuals engaged in activities aimed at preventing torture, punishing it and ensuring that all victims obtain redress and have an enforceable right to fair and adequate compensation, including the means for as full a rehabilitation as possible. We express our gratitude to all donors to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. We call on all States, in particular those which have been found to be responsible for widespread or systematic practices of torture, to contribute to the Voluntary Fund as part of a universal commitment for the rehabilitation of torture victims.

“Finally, we urge all states to join the 34 that have so far ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, and subsequently to engage with the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture.”
