

**European Network of Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres for Victims  
of Torture and Human Right Violations**

***Joint appeal to European countries: Enhancement of Contribution to the United Nations  
Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture***

26 June 2005

Minister Dermot Ahern, T.D.  
Department of Foreign Affairs,  
80 St. Stephen's Green,  
Dublin 2.

Dear Minister Ahern,

We, the undersigned 38 organizations from the European Network of Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres for Victims of Torture and Human Right Violations, would like to repeat our joint appeal of July 2004 and draw your attention to the vital importance of ensuring adequate international funding for assistance to victims of torture. We ask your country in this context to recognize the fundamental role played by the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT) by significantly increasing its contribution to the Fund.

The Fund is central to the lives of tens of thousands of survivors of torture worldwide because it is one of the few major sources of specific, targeted public funding for rehabilitation of torture victims at international level. The vast majority of rehabilitation centres are dependent on international financial support from a mix of funding from UNVFVT, the European Union and a few national bilateral donors in order to do their vital work.

The external evaluation of the Fund, carried out in 2004 by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS<sup>1</sup>), confirmed the importance of the work carried out by the rehabilitation centres and programmes for victims of torture and acknowledged the essential role of the Fund for promoting and supporting this work. The external evaluation made a number of mainly procedural recommendations for further improving the functioning of the Fund, which are now in the process of being implemented.

However, the UN Voluntary Fund's financial basis is imbalanced and not secure. The most recent figures for the Fund show that, of the \$7.4 million available in 2005, more than \$ 5.4 million -- or 65% -- was the contribution of the United States government. This means that only \$2 million was contributed by the rest of the world including the EU and is inconsistent with a firm aspiration to support and promote human rights. The Fund's reliance on the US government contribution for an ever-increasing proportion of its budget is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term.

Torture is among the most egregious violations of human rights. The gravity of torture puts it in the rare company of but a handful of other violations prohibited by of international human rights and humanitarian law from which no derogation is ever possible, even in times of war. Yet despite this unassailable legal recognition, survivors of torture are often the forgotten victims of these crimes. It is estimated that torture continues to be practiced in 150 countries worldwide<sup>2</sup>.

Victims of torture have a legal right to many forms of reparation -- from legal redress to medical and psycho-social rehabilitation -- as recognized by all relevant international instruments<sup>3</sup>. The specialized centres and programmes involved in the global torture rehabilitation movement are the only facilities that have unique competency to address the needs of survivors from a medical, psychological and psycho-social point of view

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<sup>1</sup> UN Document E/CN.4/2005/55

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, *Combating Torture – A Manual for Action*, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Such as, for instance, UN Convention Against Torture

and thus to assist them in regaining their physical and mental health and the dignity of their lives. As recognition of victims' special needs and rights has grown in the last decades, so has the torture rehabilitation movement: from only a handful of centres in the 1980s to nearly 200 today.

The resources available to adequately respond to the needs of torture survivors have not kept pace with the increasing attention to victims rights. Financial resources for rehabilitation remain woefully inadequate, with the concrete result that victims are often doubly wronged: first tortured, and then neglected. As just one example, of the expressed global need for UN support of more than \$13 million per annum, the UN Voluntary Fund was able to distribute only \$ 7.4 million in its last grant round in 2005.

Europe, in particular, needs to take a leading role in supporting the Fund.

In several European countries, the amount received by rehabilitation centres in the country through the UN Voluntary Fund far exceeds the amount the same country has contributed. This makes several wealthy European countries net beneficiaries of the Fund rather than net contributors, draining resources from rehabilitation centres in poorer, needier regions where few – if any – alternatives to the Fund exist and where torture is endemic or was previously.

We recognize that European Union member states indirectly contribute to the rehabilitation of torture victims through the funds allocated for this purpose by the European Union. Some of them also contribute to the fight against torture in the world through their national development assistance agencies and co-operation programmes. For instance, the largest European donors to the Fund - such as Denmark or the Netherlands - contribute to the movement also through their development agencies. Whereas such assistance is recognised as valuable support, the UNVFVT has the added value of being a dedicated fund that is independent, accountable, global in its outreach and with unrestricted access.

Increased advocacy efforts in 2004 towards European governments have had some success and we were pleased to see several countries significantly increasing their contribution such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg , Finland and France, or reinitiating their contributions such as Italy. Building on this positive momentum, we invite these and other countries to continue to increase their part.

The UNVFVT, independent from other types of support, allows ensuring that small or developing centres, with little or no access to other sources will be able to deliver services in those parts of the world where they are most needed.

The European Network of Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres for Victims of Torture and Human Right Violations trust that you and your colleagues in government will respond generously to this appeal. Survivors of torture and their families will be enabled as their lives are rebuilt and their involvement as active, healthy participants in the society ensured.

On June 26, we will commemorate the UN International Day for Support to Victims of Torture; this could be the occasion for your government to announce an increased contribution.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

**The signatories:**

Appartenances-Vaud, Switzerland

Assistance Centre for Torture Survivors – ACET, Bulgaria

Association Primo Levi, France

Association pour les Victimes de Répression en Exil, France

BAFF (Bundesweite Arbeitsgemeinschaft der psychosozialen Zentren für Flüchtlinge und Folteropfer), Germany

The Berlin Center for Treatment of Torture Victims (Behandlungszentrum für Folteropfer Berlin), Germany

Centre for the Care of Survivors of Torture, SPIRASI, Ireland

Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Victims - International Aid Network (CRTV-IAN) Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro

Centre for Migration and Health (Swiss Red Cross), Switzerland

Center for torture victims, Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina

Centre for Trauma and Torture Survivors (CETT), Denmark

CIR – VI.TO, Italy

Cordelia Foundation, Hungary

EXIL, Belgium

CMH Zagreb, Croatia

GCRT, Georgia

Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Centre for Torture Survivors in Finland/CTSF, Finland

ICAR Foundation, Romania

IRCT

IRCT Zagreb, Croatia

Kosova Rehabilitation centre for Torture Victims, Kosovo

Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture - UK

Medical Rehabilitation Center for Torture Victims, Athens, Greece

Memoria, Moldova

Oasis - Treatment and Counselling for Refugees, Denmark

OMCT

NAGA-HAR - Centro per Richiedenti asilo, Rifugiati e Vittime della tortura, Italy

Parcours, France

PHAROS - Centre of expertise on refugees and health, the Netherlands

Psychosocial Team for refugees in Mid-Norway, MNHF, Trondheim, Norway

Psychosocial Team for refugees in Southern Norway, SSHF, Kristiansand, Norway

The Red Cross Center for Tortured Refugees, Stockholm, Sweden

REFUGIO Bremen, Treatment Center for Traumatized Refugees and Torture Victims, Germany.

Refugio Villingen -Schwenningen rehabilitation centre for traumatized refugees, Germany

Refugio München, Germany

Therapiezentrum für Folteropfer, Köln, Germany

Women's Therapy Centre Medica Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Xenion Berlin, Germany