

Nothing can justify torture.

ANNUAL REPORT

2016 World Organisation
Against Torture
(OMCT)



"A State which tortures does not have self-confidence. A State which tortures is not well. And as is sometimes the case in psychiatry, the patients do not understand. We need therefore the doctors. We need therefore, the OMCT."

~ François Longchamp, President of the Council of State of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, speaking at the OMCT General Assembly, November 2016.

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A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT



Hina Jilani,
President

A local and global response

I am honored to address you for the first time in an Annual Report of the OMCT since being elected as OMCT President in November 2016.

While new in this function, the OMCT and its cause are far from new to me. I have known and valued its work for many years. I was able to count on and value its support as an activist and lawyer in Pakistan and in my role as UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders.

As a human rights lawyer in Pakistan, I know only too well how challenging and dangerous exposing torture and impunity can be. Many of us take on powerful institutions and interests, or challenge deeply ingrained discrimination and stereotypes by investigating torture cases. The sense of vulnerability when we are portrayed as out of touch, unpatriotic or worse, takes a high toll on many of us. Many of us are also targets of violent extremisms because of the values we protect. Yet governments portray us as naïve on those very same threats. It is incredibly important to have somebody reliable to turn to. The OMCT enables us to continue our struggle.

Torture is far more present than many think. It is well hidden, shrouded in secrecy and victims are often afraid or ashamed to come forward. It is striking to me how much it is met with complacency and how little understanding there is of the deep injuries it inflicts on our societies.

In my region as in many others, being sent to 'judicial remand' is often tantamount to being sent to torture. It is a predictable reality. Yet, rarely do the authorities act to protect. And protest against it is met with ignorance and complacency. We must challenge this.

Torture is at the very heart of many ills our societies suffer. It feeds on, and feeds discrimination and exclusion. For as long as ordinary citizens cannot trust the state it is not likely that they will value state institutions or democracy itself for that matter. Where torture is tolerated there is no rule of law, neither for the ordinary citizen, nor at the end of the day, for business. I have seen no conflict in the world in which torture did not thrive. It ultimately exacerbates tensions and often increases sympathy to radical causes.

I come from a country that has seen a great deal of terrorist violence. The idea that torture can solve such problems has nothing to do with reality. We must not allow terrorists to hide behind ideology. It is far better to stick to the rule of law, to unmask terrorism for what it truly is – ruthless murder. Ultimately: is it not better to counter all those who want us to believe in a conflict of culture or religion with perhaps the most universal value of all – human dignity?

Of course torture is not new. But there is today a threat to the broader human rights framework. To say it in the words of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights at the opening of our 30th anniversary meeting:

'The Human Rights Movement has achieved a huge amount in the last 70 years, but it also means we have so much more to lose, so much more to lose, and we have to be aware of that. And it can go very quickly. The architecture can disappear very quickly.'

The universal human rights system may be imperfect but it is fundamental, and consensually agreed. In meeting with officials or opinion leaders I sense a great deal of uncertainty. I hear some speak of 'a softer landing grounds' to be found with human rights violating countries. Ignoring human rights for national or economic interest is voiced without any hesitation. A 'my country first' is often a disguised 'my country only'. It is dangerous, not innocent. Such discourses have consequences, understood by those hoping for a free pass to secure their power by repression, to justify their discrimination, and to implement their cruelty, all at the expense of dignity.

Yes, the OMCT is needed more than ever.

Anybody present at the 30th year anniversary last year could sense both the urgency for action, but also the energy that the OMCT's SOS-Torture Network brings to the table to fight back.

This report of the OMCT's work in 2016 shows how much impact an organization can achieve with a small group of dedicated staff. And it enables one to sense how much potential it has if such small groups, working together, can mobilize a global network to become a global movement.

Not local versus global but local and global, united!

Hina Jilani
OMCT President

A WORD FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL



Gerald Staberock,
Secretary General

Fighting the new normal! The OMCT movement at age 30

'Is this normal?' The title of our social media campaign in Tunisia provides the point of interrogation that could characterize much of the year 2016. Our answer is: *No*.

It is not normal that torture is still practiced across the world despite all the legal prohibitions and the fact that most States have firmly committed to respect the UN Convention Against Torture. No, it is not normal that a U.S. President publicly claims that torture 'absolutely works'. But this is only one marker for what is to come. No, it is not normal that countries such as Turkey and the Philippines – which had been praised for their torture prevention efforts during the last decade – are pushing away from human rights, or that others in Eastern Europe turn to deconstruct the rule of law.

Populist ideologies are spreading, building dangerous alliances with authoritarian States. Added to this is an ever more repressive environment for anti-torture organizations around the world, in which they are portrayed as hostile to the state, 'pursuing western interests' with 'western funding'. All this in a world with real threats of terrorism and discourses on national security that put past gains in the fight against torture at risk, and a climate in the migration debate in throughout Europe that changes how European governments and societies view human rights. No - 2016 was not a normal year.

'A call to action' This is above all a call to action. Complacency would not be normal. Not for the OMCT, nor for its members. Of course we should not forget the brighter side of the picture. A good number of countries still moved forward on reforms. This Annual Report illustrates a number of important victories and we will do all we can to seize more and trigger other such opportunities.

Our campaign in Tunisia mentioned at the beginning is one of the new ways the OMCT has developed to counter a discourse-change in the face of real threats such as terrorism, and to show the real story of torture. In Tunisia it has enabled us to contrast the often-generic justification discourse with the real life stories of victims, often far away from any terrorist links. Interestingly, such stories show how police abuse is feeding resentment against democratic institutions, contributing – not only in Tunisia – to a breeding ground for extremism.

Countering 'the new normal' For the OMCT, 2016 was also its 30th anniversary year. We took the moment as an opportunity, both to look back in pride and to adjust its heritage to today's realities, to make our Network stronger.

Over the past 30 years, people in many countries have had their lives improved, their dignity restored, as laws and policies have been changed, and generally worldwide, people are better protected against torture. But these gains must also be defended. The OMCT is today a global player not only in torture protection, but also in the direct protection of human rights defenders under threat – having joined forces in 2016 with 11 organizations to protect defenders from threats to their lives, against imprisonment, arrest or harassment.

But the OMCT's greatest asset is that it does not act alone. Its founders created it as a civil society network convinced that lasting change will only come if actors across the world are empowered to act against torture – united in a broader movement – the SOS-Torture Network. Over the last three years, the OMCT has gone through a consultative process to redefine, together with our Network, how we can respond globally to the changing climate on human rights. The result is a forward-looking strategy putting the emphasis on our Network – on collective support, collective action, and collective impact.

Now united more than ever, we will continue to challenge torture as not normal, supporting victims together, and challenging impunity together. We will continue some of our most successful programs such as those on the protection of human rights defenders, children and women, and make sure that international standards are implemented domestically. And we will ask you to participate, support us, act with us.

Join us, as we launch new network-driven initiatives in 2017 - to address the lack of protection of migrants from torture, to protect those most vulnerable, indigenous peoples, women, children, and to engage in new ways in a security debate that should always be anchored in a fundamental respect for the absolute prohibition of torture.

It is collective force that is needed to counter the harmful currents and to regain the space for the fight against torture. This is the time to mobilize, not timidly but directly, upfront and as a Network. We cannot win defensive debates and we have to reset a positive agenda. Our motto, essentially agreed to by over 160 States, echoes through the years... Nothing can justify torture, under any circumstances.

Time to say thank you!

I take this opportunity to express my deep thanks to all who have contributed to the OMCT's work over the year 2016!

An organization is not an empty shell. It has identity and a soul because of the people who live the organization every day. Much of what we achieve is only possible because victims, defenders on the ground, and others around the world trust the OMCT and the individuals working for it. It is their commitment, their empathy for victims, and their tireless solidarity that matters when our members or partners are threatened. I am incredibly grateful to our teams in Geneva, Brussels and Tunis, including many interns, that have helped us, learned with us, and created with us. Pressures often fly high as partners and defenders need immediate and urgent responses. Looking at the amount and quality of work we have managed, I must say: chapeau and thank you!

2016 was an anniversary year and we can only value our founders, who set-up the OMCT as they did. We want to recognize all those who have contributed over the 30 years, notably Eric Sottas who formed it like nobody else, but also all of its founders, former presidents, staff, and all of you who have supported us on our way. The OMCT has been, is, and will always remain your OMCT!

Our achievements are only possible with those on the frontlines in our global SOS-Torture Network. As Leyla Yunus said in the OMCT campaign video on 10 December, typical for many of our partners: 'this is not a job – it is my life'.

Our General Assembly in 2016 has brought changes to our Executive Council. Special gratitude to Yves Berthelot, who will continue to serve the OMCT but whose presidency ended after 8 eventful years. I could always count on his support when it was needed. He has steered this ship safely through not always easy waters, and has been ready at any moment to personally help members under threat. Merci Yves!

I owe a personal thank you to Pierre Galand and the members of our OMCT Europe Board. Thanks to Pierre's leadership, support and friendship the OMCT has today a firm place in Brussels and is using it as an increasingly significant pillar of its work.

I would like to thank a few other friends in particular: Christine Sayegh and our special advisors Eliane Babel-Guérin and

Dominique Brustlein-Bobst. I also thank Shakeel Mozzafar who made extra efforts to join our Anniversary meeting and his wife Joan Holmes for their confidence. And of course we extend our thanks to our donors, without whom we would not exist. In times of human rights crisis, organizations need friends. In the donor community too. Many of you have been a sounding board for us on new ideas. We are looking forward to your help putting them in place together.

Last but not least I would like to thank those who made our 30 year anniversary event so memorable. Christiane Hessel who reminded us in powerful words how important it is today also in Europe to stand up for human dignity. A very special thank you to the Ville de Genève for so graciously hosting our celebration in the Palais Eynard. Warm thanks to Noemie Kocher and Ann Richard for their support, commitment to our cause and helping to make the celebration unforgettable. And to Louisy Joseph, French singer whose voice served as the beacon for a new generation to join the global anti-torture movement against torture for the next 30 years. She ultimately proved to us that anti-torture defenders are not only 'humans' but also 'dancers'!

The OMCT is looking forward to making 2017 a success with you!

Gerald Staberock
Secretary-General

KEY NUMBERS OF 2016

Advocacy for more than **1,000** human rights defenders

The OMCT provided protective advocacy for 1,101 human rights defenders, benefitting 100 NGOs from 60 countries, ensuring the relocation of defenders to safety, advocating the end of impunity and pressing for legal environments more favorable to human rights defenders and their invaluable contribution to society.

33 Field Missions

The OMCT, in the framework of its different programs, conducted a total of 33 missions in 20 countries: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Cambodia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Morocco, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Tunisia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Field missions enable trial observations, fact finding work, trainings, meetings with local authorities, and prison visits, while always also strengthening relationships with Network Members and partners.

A safety net for **70** victims of torture

Through its global victims assistance programme and its work in two victim centres in Tunisia, OMCT provided vital and direct legal, medical and social assistance to 70 victims of torture and their families, often providing it when no other support was available.

Network members from around **35** countries gather in Geneva for the quadrennial General Assembly

To celebrate its 30-year anniversary, the OMCT invited members of its Network around the development of a common agenda and toolkit to better fight torture. The celebration was held during our General Assembly, in November 2016.

54 monitoring visits to children in detention

Torture happens in secret. Civil society's access to places of juvenile detention centers is a key factor in the protection of children deprived of their liberty. In 2016, OMCT jointly with its partners conducted 54 monitoring visits to prisons where children are held, and engaged national authorities to improve detention conditions.

NGOs submit **16** country reports to the CAT

Each year, the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) reviews what Member States have done to combat torture and ill-treatment. It draws on any publicly available information including government reports and so-called "alternative reports" thoroughly researched and compiled by local and international NGOs.

The latter are essential tools to ensure that Committee experts get access to information that many States want to hide. Thanks to the OMCT's decisive work to promote, support and coordinate civil-society involvement at the CAT, in 2016, NGOs submitted alternative reports for 16 out of the 18 countries reviewed during the 57th, 58th and 59th Sessions.

Over **100** authoritative recommendations by CAT

Far surpassing prior assessments of CSO impact on CAT Reports of States, in 2016 almost 50% of all OMCT and partner NGO recommendations we submitted were reflected in the UN Committee's reviews of countries, many with serious and very specific challenges regarding torture. This shows that civil society organisations have an increasing impact on the outputs of the UN CAT, in issuing better recommendations for policy changes to reviewed States, and thereby enabling sharper civil society follow-up.

URGENT ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS OF TORTURE

THE SITUATION

“Victims come from all walks of life: men, women, and heartbreakingly, a growing number of children. They are indigenous people and minorities; human rights defenders, political opponents and journalists; migrants; people with disabilities; people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex; or simply inhabitants of certain neighbourhoods. They are selected for torture at random, or targeted and hunted down. In a context of often extreme secrecy, it would be difficult to estimate the full number of victims of torture globally. But with conflicts multiplying in many parts of the world, and millions of people leaving places of violence and deprivation to seek a better life, many reports indicate that torture and ill treatment are on the rise, in contexts that are increasingly complex.”

~ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, addressing the OMCT SOS-Torture Network at our 30 Year Anniversary Forum (November, 2016).

The above analysis reflects a dark reality of the 21st century, as people are tortured every day around the world. Their plight and needs are rarely addressed, paving the way to more torture and abuse and thus feeding the culture of impunity – a culture present in so many countries we work in. Even worse is the almost total absence of recognition, which perpetuates victims' trauma.

WHAT WE DO

Direct legal, medical or social assistance to victims of torture or ill treatment

The OMCT Urgent Assistance Fund for Victims of Torture is a fundamental pillar of our support to the global anti-torture movement, and serves as a unique safety net for torture victims. It provides a targeted emergency lifeline to torture victims when such support does not exist, is inaccessible or is simply too dangerous to be provided by one of our members directly. The assistance is always tailored to the individual situation and includes:

- Legal: including providing access to a lawyer, intervening on a victims' behalf, or collecting evidence of torture through medical examinations that can be used in court.
- Social: including access to basic services, living subsidies, safety measures, and, in the worst cases, temporary relocation to safety when the life of a victim is threatened.
- Medical: including for emergency treatment when such treatment is not affordable or accessible, and we facilitate longer-term treatments.

How does the Fund work?

- We work through local organisations: to verify cases, to ensure transparency and accountability, and to follow-up after treatment.
- We help victims' families, and we create support groups around them.
- We listen to victims, and we raise their cases directly with States.
- We help victims recover, and with them we seek justice and reparation.

Thanks to our trusted network of partner organisations working in the field, the OMCT can reach victims anywhere in the world, within days, or even hours. This ensures fast access to effective remedies, and enables them to start down the road to rehabilitation. Though we have modest means, and provide only urgent assistance in amounts averaging 500 – 2,500 CHF, through this assistance we have witnessed despair turning into hope, deep pain relieved, families back on their feet, and justice being sought.

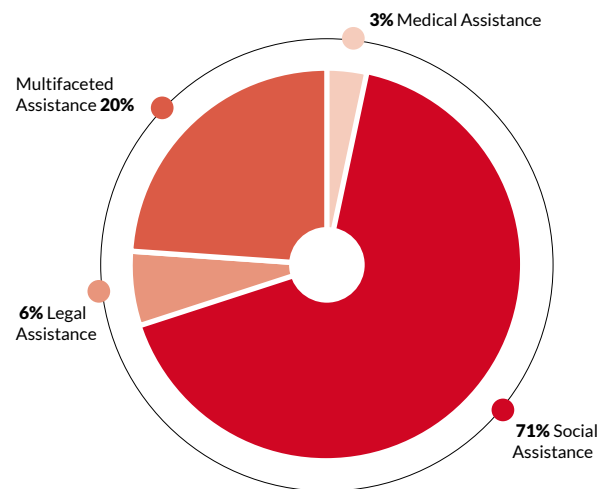
OUR 2016 – ASSISTANCE AND STORIES

In 2016, the OMCT provided legal, medical and/or social assistance in 35 cases, supporting 141 direct and indirect victims, including from Pakistan, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Uganda, Spain and Turkey.

Through two victim assistance centres in Tunisia, we supported another 36 victims of torture (see [SANAD Centres](#)). The OMCT also supported partners delivering victim assistance in particularly difficult circumstances enabling them to reach victims otherwise unattended, in regions such as the Russian Federation, India, Bangladesh or Burundi.

Many more victims reached out to the OMCT for help in the course of the year but due to a shortage of funds our organisation was forced to suspend the programme, which was only resumed towards the end of 2016. In 2015, OMCT had assisted 155 victims.

Type of assistance provided in 2016



THE HUMAN STORY

Side-by-side to the end; a story from Pakistan

“On Jan. 13, Liaqat’s frail body couldn’t take any more..., he succumbed to his internal injuries. Khurram, tortured so badly he can barely stand now, told us that the night his father died, the police had hung him upside down with a rope and beat him up indiscriminately.”

~ testimony by the victim’s brother, on torture of his brother and nephew by police (2012).

In January 2016, Khurram Masih was 20 years old when police officers detained him. At the time he was a student, and drove a rickshaw on the side to help feed his family of modest means. His father, Liaqat Masih, a Christian, was a driver for the family of Mr. Raza Hameed, the son of Gujranwala politician S.A. Hameed, an influential Pakistani politician in the PTI party. His mother was a housewife taking care of Khurram and his three siblings. Following an alleged theft of cash and gold jewellery from his father’s employer’s house, Khurram’s father was arrested, though without evidence linking him to the crime. According to a later news story, his family believe this was an attempt to extort money out of the family to replace the stolen gold, as Mr. Hameed had no insurance.

Khurram’s father was repeatedly tortured for over two months by the police, including in the presence of his employers, who were demanding a confession. After he refused to confess to the crime, the police detained his son, Khurram, also without any charges. Khurram and his father were then tortured, together, in front of each other. Police pulled Khurram’s legs so much that his muscles and joints became almost disabled. His father refused to confess. They tortured them with wooden sticks and rods, kicking, slapping, and punching them. They didn’t let them sleep. And then they hung both father and son from the roof with their arms behind their backs over a piece of wood. The pain from only seconds of this is profoundly excruciating. Due to the torture, Liaqat Masih died, right next to his son. Khurram survived, but became seriously injured. He could no longer walk or sit properly.

The [Human Friends Organisation](#) (HFO), a Pakistani human rights organisation, contacted the OMCT to seek help for Khurram in February 2016. The OMCT provided the support, and the HFO facilitated Khurram’s medical treatment, including for x-rays, physical therapy and medication, and for his psychosocial assistance, to start down the road to recovery. The OMCT then provided support for basic subsistence costs of his family during the following months, simultaneously with the continued support for his recovery, as he would now have to become his family’s main bread-winner.

Thus far, nobody has been questioned or arrested in this case. But Khurram has now recovered, and is slowly returning to work. The OMCT and the HFO continue working together to seek justice for Khurram and his father. The case against the perpetrators is currently pending before the Sessions Court of Gujranwala, Pakistan.

Honoring survivors of torture

Victims of torture are not just any kind of victim, they have to fight for their recovery and must also keep fighting to stay safe from further harm as they often can testify as living proof to someone else's crime. That is not an easy position when the latter is the result of the orders or acquiescence of a State, which can seamlessly activate an arsenal of repressive tools including smear campaigns, surveillance, and judicial harassment in order to eliminate any reputational hazards or to crush opponents challenging its authority.

Torture leaves many external and internal scars. It does not go away when it is over. It follows you wherever you go. Forever. Worse still, most people who have not experienced it cannot even fathom how horrendous it is or what it means. Husbands do not want to hear their wives were raped; mothers cannot bear the thought of their children suffering such atrocious pain; children do not want their parents denouncing known torturers for fear they will this time die in retaliation; non-corrupt public officials cannot believe their colleagues might have reached such levels of cruelty behind closed doors...

And so the stories of victims go untold and survivors are left having to face ongoing persecution, limited access to medical or psychological assistance, and without support to obtain proof of – or redress for – what they endured. This total isolation just adds to the acts of torture.

The OMCT recognizes the legislative shortcomings nationally and at the global level, and understands first-hand the needs of survivors.

That is why, every June 26th – the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the OMCT celebrates these exceptional men and women around the world who are still standing, and who did not allow the torture to break them.

Thanks to the partners of its international network SOS-Torture, last year, the OMCT created a global awareness-raising campaign in support of victims of torture aimed at showing how torture can touch anyone, anywhere, anytime. Dubbed #HumansAgainstTorture or HAT, it focused on stripping torture of its "exceptionality" by showing its many faces and trends, so as to strengthen the alliance of all nations, individuals, and organisations from all walks of life, against practices that are more common than one might think.



Empathy is the first preventive step towards understanding and protecting victims. The second is to spread the word that anyone can be a victim of torture at any given time and that it must be put to an end.

The campaign invited participants on social media platforms to symbolically put themselves in the shoes of survivors and offer them protection by putting on a hat – the acronym of the campaign's slogan. It was the first time OMCT created a full, dedicated [micro website for a campaign](#). To spread the word on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, participants were invited to take a selfie wearing a hat, to make a statement against torture and/or donate money for OMCT's victims fund, using the hashtag. Finally they were asked to tag friends in order to keep the ball rolling. The project came to life thanks to the outstanding involvement of OMCT's goodwill ambassador [Noémie Kocher](#), and [Sheba Arinaitwe Brun](#), Miss Uganda 2002, both starring in our campaign videos, as well as photographer Benoit Brun, videographer Grégory Maillot, and the WIDE digital agency team, donating time to enable it to come to life.

In parallel to this online activism, the campaign kicked off in Geneva with the screening of [Voyage en Barbarie](#), a documentary film by [Cécile Allegra](#) on the plight of Eritrean refugees while on route to a better life. They were tortured by human traffickers in the Sinai desert to ransom their families. The film, that won the 2016 OMCT prize at the [International Film Festival and Forum for Human Rights \(FIFDH\)](#), was followed by a debate in partnership with the UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency. The debate focused on the hot topic of torture along migration routes – now one of the OMCT's working groups on which its SOS-Torture Network will be taking the initial steps to make inroads for change. The debate was moderated by RTS (Radio Television Suisse) and TV5MONDE correspondent Michel Cerutti.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

THE SITUATION

In 2014, the OMCT documented 9 killings of human rights defenders (HRDs) around the world. In 2015 there were 26, and 30 in 2016. If attacks on and killings of HRDs are used as an indicator, then their situation is getting worse. In 2014 and 2015 the OMCT provided direct assistance to 27 HRDs and NGOs in grave danger; in 2016 we aided 39, many of them receiving direct threats against their life, liberty and safety as a result of their work. Without our assistance the situation might have been much worse for many of them. But killings and attacks remain one of many indicators, capturing only one part of the challenge in protecting and assisting defenders.



“In Mexico, when you say that you are a human rights defender, people immediately think of you as a defender of the criminals, that you are against security policies.”

Olga Guzman Vergara, Advocacy Director, Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, Mexico; Photo ©point-of-views.ch

HRDs around the world put their lives on the line to protect our political, civic, economic, and social or cultural rights - our human rights. Sometimes they trigger positive changes for human rights; other times they defend them against negative changes. They speak out and go to the frontline on behalf of those who do not dare, those who are too few, or those who cannot speak for themselves. By doing this, they often end up becoming, along with their colleagues and families, preferred targets of authorities and non-State actors who attempt to silence them through arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearances, or even summary executions or murder. Why is it fundamental to protect human rights defenders? Because there is no prospect for protection from torture, or struggles for social justice, if the women and men who defend rights on the ground are not safe or able to engage in their work, or if their organisations are being threatened, attacked, or closed.

Over recent years, the working environment for human rights defenders worldwide has deteriorated significantly. There have been more threats, more false accusations, more legal restrictions, and more direct attacks. A growing number of countries around the world have introduced repressive measures that undermine the exercise of the right to freedom of association (including the right to access funding), expression and peaceful assembly. These restrictions violate universally recognised standards of human rights, and are detrimental to civil society in general – not to mention they basically obstruct any aid to victims or the pursuit of justice. This change of environment threatens the very existence of a democratic, rights-based civil society.

WHAT WE DO

Every attack on an HRD is an attack on all human rights. On our rights, on your rights. The OMCT endeavours to ensure HRDs voices are not silenced – a silence which often ensures the silence of victims. The OMCT's Human Rights Defenders Programme was initiated in the early 1990s. In 1997, we joined forces with the [FIDH](#) to establish the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. And in 2015 the OMCT joined with 12 other global and regional HRDs protection organisations to constitute [ProtectDefenders.EU](#) – the largest global HRDs protection and assistance mechanism (see more below). Today, the OMCT is one of the anchor NGOs supporting and protecting HRDs.

Over the years we have helped protect hundreds of HRDs. We've also strengthened the institutional systems of protection for HRDs at the local, regional and international levels. Today through its joint venture in the Observatory, the OMCT is one of the few global players in the protection of human rights defenders, operating and monitoring a unique global alert or 911 emergency system.

The OMCT's support to HRDs is a comprehensive protection strategy incorporating elements of early-warning, prevention, advocacy, joint-coordination, monitoring, outreach, and direct assistance. We operate an international alert mechanism responding to about 300 cases a year. We provide protection and urgent assistance (emergency material, social and legal support) benefitting hundreds of HRDs and NGOs from over 50 countries per year. We undertake country missions to monitor threats, advocate for HRDs protection, provide support and solidarity, observe trials and gain visibility for defenders under attack. We mobilise and consolidate international and regional mechanisms into urgent actions for the protection of HRDs. Finally, we train HRDs in protection strategies as well as continuing their work in crisis-stricken and increasingly volatile environments.

Direct support to HRDs and organisations at risk

In 2016, the OMCT provided material and emergency support to 33 at risk HRDs, in 14 different countries - in some cases helping their families, in others an NGO - as well as one collective of rural communities. Such support is most frequently provided to ensure their physical and online security, to offer urgent temporary relocation, or for medical or legal assistance. Out of the 33 cases, the following two cases illustrate what we do:

- In 2016, the OMCT allocated a grant to enhance the security of the Director and the offices of an LGBTI NGO from Honduras, that have been facing death threats, verbal and physical harassment, violence, ill-treatment as well as constant surveillance.
- OMCT also allocated a grant to a WHRD working in one of the most radicalized areas of the country, in order to support her relocation to safety within **Pakistan**, as her life was in danger because of her work. "Thanks a million to OMCT for supporting me in my critical situations due to my work and lending a voice for the voiceless segments in tribal society."

In addition, the OMCT provided **financial support to five NGOs or local NGO networks** in four countries to enable continuing their essential human rights activities in highly adverse or volatile contexts.



Rosemarie Trajano, Secretary General, Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates, Philippines; Photo ©point-of-views.ch

STORIES AND IMPACTS

Each and every one of the 300+ cases in which we intervene has a story, has specific needs, and requires an intensive individual effort to sound the alert on an abuse, keep up the pressure, mobilize support from those who may have an influence, and if need be, litigate to ensure accountability for violations. Our appeals, alerts, but also advocacy behind the scenes with those who may have an ability to influence is highly regarded by defenders around the world. The OMCT and the Observatory are a trusted source for human rights ambassadors, universal or regional protection mechanisms, and the media who regularly rely on the information disseminated by our alert system.

Some stories in a year of engagement on human rights defenders will end in victory. In the majority of cases defenders report improvement of their situation. While it can at times be difficult to prove its impact, the work of the OMCT can and does mobilize the support needed to tip the scales towards the comprehensive protection for HRDs, and often alleviates or puts an end to the repression they face.

But other stories end in tragedy, despite all we do to avoid this. Some such stories follow.



photo: www.bertacaceres.org

Paying the highest price to defend human rights

In Honduras, HRDs face killings, threats and criminalisation almost every day as a result of their human rights work. Between May and December 2016, 16 HRDs were killed in Honduras, now considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world for HRDs. Most of these attacks remain unpunished. Throughout 2016, the OMCT raised awareness and urged action, including from the EU and UN, to address the high levels of violence directed against HRDs there. In addition to regular Urgent Interventions and related advocacy activities, we carried out a fact-finding mission in Honduras in April 2016, with a special emphasis on land- and LGBTI-rights defenders. The resulting Mission Report highlights the high levels of violence faced daily by HRDs, the misuse of criminal laws against them, the impunity for attacks committed against them, the absence of protective measures, and an increasing militarisation within the country.

On March 3, 2016, Ms. Berta Isabel Cáceres Flores, Cofounder and Coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), was killed at night in her house in the city of La Esperanza. Berta Cáceres spent her life defending the territorial and cultural rights of indigenous peoples, Garífuna peoples and peasants. She notably defended the rights of the Lenca indigenous people to recover their ancestral land, and against the construction of the hydroelectric dam "Agua Zarca" by the Energy Development Company S.A. (DESA). Her work was internationally recognised, including through prestigious awards. Yet over a year after her murder, questions remain unanswered. Finally, in June 2017, international institutions funding the Agua Zarca dam finally announced that they were withdrawing their support. One can only regret that this outcome occurred only after Berta's murder and the global outcry it prompted.

Kenya: police officers charged in murder of human rights lawyer

In June 2016, Willie Kimani, a human rights lawyer specialized in representing indigent victims of police brutality and other police malpractices, was abducted, tortured, and subsequently killed alongside a client and his taxi driver. Police responsibility for the murder was initially denied. However, as the case provoked national and international outrage against the excessive use of force by the police and the generalised impunity in Kenya, in July 2016, four police officers were arrested in relation to the killings. Their trial opened in November 2016 and is still ongoing. (Please see the OMCT intervention [here](#).) The killing of human rights defenders as in this case remains only the tip of the iceberg, and prompted our high-level mission in October 2016 to collect information on the situation of human rights defenders in partnership with OMCT local member organisations. The mission engaged with civil society and senior government officials and its findings have received considerable coverage in local media and have been taken up by international actors such as the EU in its engagement with Kenya ([see](#) the OMCT press release).



Acquittal and release of HRDs in Guatemala

Between February and June of 2016, three HRDs from North Huehuetenango were arrested and detained – all on variously false charges, including coercion, threats, incitement to crime, obstruction of justice, kidnapping, and others. They joined two others who'd been in detention for almost a year on similar charges. Most of these charges would probably not stand in an independent court of law, however, to ensure their right to a fair trial, the OMCT carried out a mission in July to observe their trial. The case was emblematic of the “criminalization” of HRDs for their true activities: the defence of the territories and natural resources of their communities in North Huehuetenango from unpopular development projects.

After 13 days of trial, Juan Francisco Pedro, Adalberto Villatoro, Arturo Juan Pablo, Hermit Lopez, Mynor Lopez, Domingo Baltazar and Rigoberto Juarez were all acquitted and released. The support provided by our Network Member UDEFEGUA was crucial in ensuring the effectiveness of OMCT's action on the ground. HRDs in Guatemala strongly believe that international attention on this case was a key reason for the positive outcome in a very sensitive trial ([see](#) the OMCT intervention).



OUR 2016 OUTPUTS

Awareness raising & protection

- [398 Urgent Interventions](#) (Urgent Appeals, Open Letters, Press Releases) benefitting 1,101 HRDs and 100 NGOs from 60 countries.
- Six international fact-finding, advocacy and solidarity missions: [Ecuador](#), [Guatemala](#), Honduras ([two missions](#)), [Kenya](#) and [Kyrgyzstan](#).
- 18 trial observation missions on 12 cases concerning 52 HRDs in [Bahrain](#), [Cambodia](#), [Guatemala](#), [Honduras](#), [Kazakhstan](#), [Kuwait](#), [Kyrgyzstan](#), [Oman](#), [Morocco](#), [Tunisia](#), [Turkey](#) and the [United Arab Emirates](#).
- Joint “[Stand 4 Human Rights Defenders](#)” campaign run by the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN), of which OMCT is a member.
- Collaboration in the [HRD Memorial](#), launched in November 2016 by a coalition of 22 NGOs led by Front Line Defenders to celebrate the lives and achievements of killed HRDs.
- Campaign “[The Heroes of Human Rights](#)”, paying tribute to 10 HRDs fighting against torture to mark Human Rights Day, December 10, 2016.

Capacity building for HRDs

In 2016, the OMCT organized three trainings with local partners in Guatemala, Russia and Zimbabwe, reaching 68 HRDs from eight countries, aiming at improving HRDs' security, sharpening their advocacy strategies, connecting them to stronger networks, and deepening their expertise in key areas of human rights.

Mobilizing intergovernmental organizations

- UN Human Rights Council: 9 joint events on HRDs in Thailand, Burundi, Asia, East Horn of Africa, Yemen, Mexico, Bahrain, and the Gulf region; one on HRDs ESC rights work; [1 oral statement](#), and support for advocacy of 9 HRDs and relatives from Malaysia and Mexico.
- UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): 1 joint public event on ESCR HRDs in Honduras in the framework of the 58th Session.
- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR): two oral and written [interventions](#) addressing the situation of HRDs in Africa.
- Parliamentary Assembly of the COE: 1 event on civil society space in Azerbaijan and Russia.
- Organisation for Security and Cooperation for Europe (OSCE): participation in an expert workshop for HRDs; 1 event on criminalisation of HRDs in post-Soviet countries at the HDIM.
- Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR): 1 hearing on HRDs in Honduras.
- European Union (EU): participation in the March EU CSO Forum; support for advocacy of 8 HRDs and relatives from Bangladesh and Mexico; briefings to the European Parliament/DROI Missions on Mexico and Guatemala.
- 12 submissions/quasi-judicial complaints before universal and regional protection mechanisms on 81 individuals at risk in 11 countries, prompting action on key cases.
- Organisation of two “Inter-Mechanisms Meetings” in Strasbourg and Brussels gathering intergovernmental bodies dedicated to the protection of HRDs.

Regional and country reports

- [La criminalización de defensores de derechos humanos en contextos de proyectos industriales: un fenómeno regional en América Latina](#) (February 2016).
- [Kyrgyzstan at a crossroads: shrink or widen the scene for human rights defenders](#) (June 2016).
- [Arbitrary and Illegal Detentions - Criminalization: A State Policy to Hindrance the Defence of Human Rights in Mexico](#) (September 2016).
- [Honduras: Criminalización en el Bajo Aguán: Justicia a medias](#) (September 2016).
- [Honduras: Human rights defenders between a rock and a hard place](#) (December 2016).



A commitment to join forces for better protection

Over the past years, the human rights movement has grown and become increasingly professional and sophisticated in its strategies and actions. Simultaneously, in many countries the promotion and defense of human rights is seen increasingly as a threat, and HRDs face multiple obstacles that impede their work. The repression can take many forms - from increased administrative regulations, restrictive legal frameworks and smear campaigns, to judicial harassment, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and even enforced disappearances or executions.

For over 20 years, the OMCT has been and remains today one of the core NGOs that ensure effective protection for HRDs. But as the repression against HRDs is developing increasingly multiple and more sophisticated attacks, the OMCT jointly, with 11 other NGOs decided to establish ProtectDefenders.EU.

ProtectDefenders.EU is the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism to protect defenders at high risk. It is implemented by a Consortium of 12 international and regional NGOs, including the OMCT as a board member, active in the protection of HRDs. It not only provides more direct support and protection for an impressive range of HRDs, it also brings HRD protection to a new level by enabling the pooling of resources and expertise. This protection has broader coverage and increased coordination and, ultimately, ensures a more comprehensive and effective protection of HRDs at the greatest risk. The OMCT is the only Swiss member of this Consortium and serves as one of the four board members who chaired it in the first half of 2016.

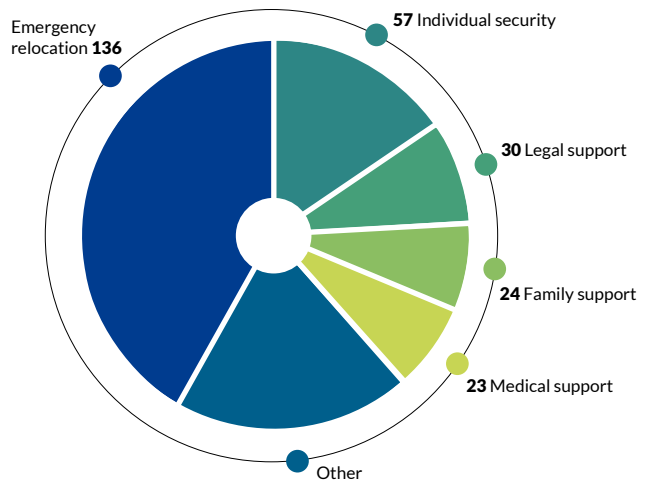
ProtectDefenders.EU delivers direct and immediate help and security to defenders, including when needed by transfer to safety and temporary relocation (to shelter cities). It uniquely enables us to join forces with others so that the limited available resources can be put to the best use. Through this mechanism we can reach further to those in need, often in rural areas, and to aid defenders in countries where they are most at risk. It also engages the EU to take a stronger protective role in the cases in which the 12 organisations intervene, thereby enabling important political support.

During the First Year of Support:

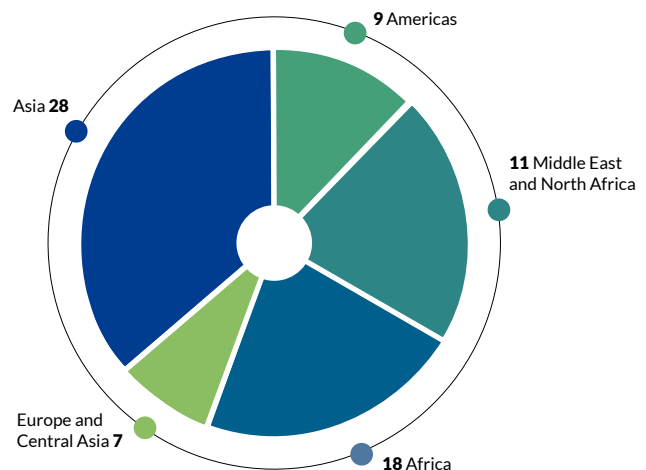
- 331 Emergency Grants were provided to HRDs at risk in 64 countries.
- 36 grants were allocated to sustain and promote the activities of local human rights NGOs.
- 149 HRDs at risk were temporarily relocated worldwide.
- 1,600+ HRDs were trained to better manage security issues they face because of their work.

For more information on ProtectDefenders, please visit ProtectDefenders.EU

331 Emergency grants allocated; More than 825,000 €



Regions of origin of relocated defenders



Example Burundi: Not allowing the state to silence defenders. Sowing the seeds for accountability.

Situation: Burundi has seen one of the most serious escalations of violence since 2015, with many believing the country is on the verge of genocide. Yet, international attention rarely focuses on this crisis.

President Pierre Nkurunziza's declaration in April 2015 that he would run for a third presidential term - even if only two are allowed by the Burundian Constitution - was followed by an escalation of political repression and violence including wide-spread torture, disappearances, extra-judicial executions, and arbitrary arrests and persecutions. The OMCT and many human rights defenders believe that the country will find itself in a severe human rights and humanitarian crisis if no action is taken.

As part of this crisis, all Burundian HRDs who had denounced violations or tried to help victims, have faced a ruthless campaign of intimidation, harassment, physical attacks, arrests and trumped-up charges and, in the most worrying cases, enforced disappearances. Some NGOs were even outlawed and most of the known human rights lawyers have been disbarred. As a result, many HRDs have fled the country and face intimidation in their country of relocation. Meaningful human rights work inside Burundi is today virtually impossible, especially on issues such as torture or the protection of the few defenders still in the country.

An innovative response:

Helping the relocation to safety of a defender can be a life-saving measure and is an important part of our work as a protection organisation within the framework of ProtectDefenders.EU. But this is not our main goal.

Our work ensures that States do not succeed in silencing the voices of victims and human rights defenders critical towards them, if we want to prevent even worse. In 2016, as part of ProtectDefenders.EU, the OMCT supported the set-up of [SOS-Torture Burundi](#) in Rwanda. This network was developed by Burundian HRDs who fled their country due to threats resulting from their human rights work. On their behalf, the OMCT intervened in numerous cases, and their transfer to safety was supported by the OMCT and ProtectDefenders.

The OMCT worked with these relocated defenders to develop a strategy that would enable continued work even while in exile. We provided the initial support to ensure that information on torture and enforced disappearance still reaches the domestic and international community. And we supported SOS-Torture Burundi to directly assist victims.

Through this innovative activity, our partners continue to monitor and raise awareness on the serious human rights abuses taking place in Burundi (including acts of torture, violence, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions) even while they are in exile. They are able to protect victims and provide vital support, including their representation before the International Criminal Court. The OMCT is working with its partners to ensure that the seeds for accountability are sown.

The example of Burundi shows the need to act quickly and in solidarity with local partners, to enable human rights work even in crises, preventing violations and building the basis for accountability in the long-term.

This is only one of the many examples on how our help allows crucial human rights defenders' work to continue, to maintain their fight against gross human rights violations and impunity even when others cannot do so. Our participation in ProtectDefenders.EU enabled us to accomplish this, in coordination with others, better than if we had done so alone.

STORIES AND IMPACTS

Cambodian HRDs on the eve of release following landmark UN decision



In early 2016, the Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association ([ADHOC](#)), a human rights organisation in Cambodia, provided human rights advice and assistance to a woman who had been falsely accused of bribing a witness. For this, Ny Sokha, Yi Soksan, Nay Vanda, and Lim Mony, four staff members of ADHOC, and former ADHOC senior staff member Ny Chakrya, known as “[#FreeThe5KH](#)”, were arrested and detained on trumped-up charges of bribery or being accomplices to bribery of a witness. In June 2016, the Observatory with our Cambodian partners, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights ([CCHR](#)) and the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights ([LICADHO](#)), completed a submission to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD).

Consequently, the UN declared in a landmark decision that the detention of these HRDs was arbitrary, and called on the Cambodian authorities to immediately release them.

The importance of this decision of the UN Working Group lies in the reference to HRDs as a “protected” group, thus entitled to equal legal protection under Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). (Please [see](#) the OMCT intervention.)

Journalist Mahmudur Rahman freed after 3+ years in prison in Bangladesh

On November 24, 2016, journalist Mahmudur Rahman was finally released on bail, after 1,322 days in arbitrary detention. Acting editor of the Daily Amar Desh, a national daily newspaper in Bangladesh, Mr. Mahmudur Rahman had been detained since April 11, 2013, when the police raided and shut down newspaper’s offices and charged him with sedition. Over the past three and half years, Mr. Rahman was charged in 74 separate politically motivated cases. He was repeatedly granted bail by the Courts, but every time he was about to be released, the police presented a new criminal case against him in order to keep him imprisoned. On November 3, 2016, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court finally upheld Mr. Rahman’s release on bail in the last case to be filed against him, even though the judiciary and police took three weeks to release him. Despite his release on bail, Mr. Rahman is still facing prosecution under 74 different criminal cases. These cases are widely regarded as fabricated and politically motivated ([see](#) the OMCT intervention).



Nine months in prison – for nothing



Actually, not for nothing – for opposing illegal logging taking place near his home. In November 2015, Ildefonso Zamora Baldomero, indigenous Tlahuica from San Juan

de Atzingo, Mexico, was arbitrarily arrested (e.g. with no charges, no warrant) in his office by over 15 police officers, beaten severely, and detained. Without any pre-trial hearing, he spent nine months in what he called an “inferno” – the Centre for Prevention and Social Re-adaptation in Tenancingo. He had received threats for his environmental defence before, and one of these threats was carried out: his son was killed in 2007. In stark contrast to Ildefonso’s case, the perpetrators of his son’s killing were never arrested or charged. In August 2016, following intense advocacy to raise awareness on his case both nationally and internationally, including by the OMCT, [Ildefonso](#) was acquitted and subsequently released, after a court found there was no evidence for his detention ([see](#) OMCT intervention).

Parliament of Kyrgyzstan rejects anti-NGO bill

The OMCT not only intervenes when there are threats to individual defenders, it also recognizes the importance in mobilizing support (through the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders) against legislation that reduces the space for local human rights organisations to act, or imposes a layer of repression on human rights work on the field. Over the last year, we have seen multiple deteriorations of the legal environment for human rights organisations. In some cases, our intervention proved insufficient, in others, the OMCT could prevent the worst changes. At times we were even able to prevent legislation impeding on human rights defence all together.

A case in point was the long-awaited move, on May 12, 2016, by the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, that finally rejected in third reading a discriminatory bill targeting NGOs, the Bill on Foreign Not-for-profit Organizations, drafted in conformity with the infamous Russian “foreign agents” law. ([see](#) the OMCT intervention). This victory shows how the OMCT, when facing this environmental change unfavourable to HRDs and their space to operate legally, can respond effectively, shielding HRDs work, and thereby enabling them to continue their activities.

CHILD PROTECTION

“During one of my visits, another very skinny boy came in and looked at my son. I look at the boy and I ask my son: ‘Do you know this boy?’ He says: ‘Yes, Mama. Many nights, when I was hanging in the bathroom, he pretended like he had to go pee or poo, to get down on all fours below me and hold me up, so that my arms wouldn’t hurt so much.’”

~ testimony by mother (2016) in Uruguay, on torture of her son for disobeying prison guards (2012).

THE SITUATION

Children in prison are especially vulnerable to torture and ill treatment. In many countries, children are imprisoned in inhumane conditions and physical abuse and torture cases are very common. They are often incarcerated for petty crimes, and sometimes with no charge at all.

Torture has a different and often more severe effect on children than adults. Their threshold for pain is much lower, they’re more vulnerable to psychological torture, the long-term consequences of torture can devastate their normal development, and very few understand they have a right to justice and reparation. Many justice systems neglect to accommodate their needs, thus risking additional trauma.

Children deprived of liberty (i.e. under arrest, imprisoned, or in administrative detention centres, etc.) are therefore particularly vulnerable to torture and more affected by torture, while simultaneously less likely to seek and less likely to obtain justice for such terrible acts...

“It was like a refrigerator and I was handcuffed. I thought I was going to die, I still dream about it.”

~ Child in the Philippines, referring to his time in a secret detention cell (2016).

“If you don’t agree to sleeping under the bed, you have to sleep standing up.”

~ Child in Benin, referring to conditions while in prison (2016).

WHAT WE DO

The OMCT established a designated programme targeted to protect children against torture in 1993 and has since been constantly refining its approach to protect children from torture – an issue that is often neglected. Indeed, child rights’ organisations often neglect to focus sufficiently on torture, while anti-torture organisations are not sufficiently attentive to children ([see](#) a video of Carolina Bárbara, OMCT Child Rights Coordinator).

At the OMCT, we focus on this directly. We monitor prisons and interview children held there. We provide assistance to child victims and their families – with medical, legal, psychological, or just basic subsistence help. We litigate cases against perpetrators, and win. We advocate for laws that increase protections – and fight against laws that reduce them. We train prison officials, lawyers and judges. We have long-term projects in some of the toughest countries. We find secret prisons holding children. We get children with no charges or convictions against them released. We host support groups for children leaving prison and their families.

We do everything we can, but there is much more we could do. In the 20 years since starting its work, the OMCT has denounced, documented and acted on hundreds of cases of child torture and ill-treatment around the world. We have not only made significant contributions to important achievements throughout 2016, but also and mainly to many children’s lives.

OUR 2016 IMPACTS

Discovery of secret detention centre in the Philippines with systematic abuse of children.

During a Mission in 2016, the OMCT received information that a secret detention centre in a Police Station was maintaining an isolation cell / secret detention centre six feet underground (under a bridge), next to a river. Children in conflict with the law and other alleged offenders had been held there illegally without access to anyone on the outside and with no information provided to their families or loved ones on their whereabouts.

One child, interviewed during the Mission while in another similar detention centre, recalled his time there, describing it as isolation in total darkness, in a space about the size of a refrigerator, heavily locked with steel bars, while his father was being tortured. The OMCT's intense follow-up advocacy with various UN Mechanisms during the CAT Review of the Philippines in April-May 2016, resulted in the Committee specifically addressing the torture of children in such secret detention facilities, urging the Philippines to "immediately close all 'secret places' of detention where people, including children, are routinely subject to torture".

Influencing key practitioners through exchanges with counterparts.

In December, the OMCT and our local partner ESAM organized a Round table - with judges, police and prison officials - to talk about torture of children deprived of liberty in Benin. For many police and prison guards, it was their first meeting with juvenile judges (created based on OMCT recommendations), and the first time they discussed and learned about torture. The main goal was to reduce pre-trial detention of children, which often would last for years without a trial in sight, and to use it only as a last resort. It generated a very important discussion. One Prison Director attending wrote to us:

"This workshop enabled me to understand a lot about our treatment of children in conflict with the law, which had a physical and moral effect on them. It now enables us to take measures that can prevent them being treated in this way. Thank you."

Highlighting ill treatment of Palestinian children in Israeli prisons.

Israel has ratified the Convention Against Torture, along with 162 other States. The OMCT undertakes to push the UN Committee Against Torture to promote anti-torture actions and policies in Israel, as we do with other States. In 2016, with leadership from the OMCT's long-time partner Defense for Children International - Palestine (DCIP), we submitted a joint Alternative Report for Israel's Review by the Committee. Our report criticized: Israel's use of prolonged administrative detention of children; the torture and ill-treatment of Palestinian children by military and police and in prisons, including to obtain confessions; the forcing of Palestinian children to sign confessions and documents in Hebrew, a language they do not understand; and the interrogation of children in the absence of a lawyer or a family member. The Committee reiterated these concerns in recommendations to Israel, also criticizing Israel's excessive use of force against Palestinians and the need for accountability ([see the report](#)).

Indictments for Torture Against Children – Defending 2015 gains in 2016.

A highlight of the OMCT's work in 2015 was the historic prosecution of 26 officials for the crime of torture against teenagers in detention centres in Uruguay – the first-ever indictments for the crime of torture against children in Uruguay. However, throughout 2016 there have been numerous attempts at influencing these criminal proceedings, and they have been successful: 12 officers have had their cases dismissed and another 14 have had their charges reduced from 'torture' to 'abuse of power', which carries a lesser punishment. But the struggle is not yet over. We have appealed these rulings and will now go to the Supreme Court. We are doing all we can to ensure that the Supreme Court is properly informed of all the relevant information and full implications of this case, including for other children deprived of liberty in Uruguay. If that doesn't work, we will bring the case to the U.N.

“Breaking the inertia of decades of malfunctioning, generations of jail-bound teenagers, and of lives that might have taken a different course, is not easy. Especially when the situation seems to be covered by a transparent veil that we all pretend not to see what happens behind.”

~ Gustavo, former educator in juvenile detention, Uruguay.

Prison monitoring and documenting cases of torture of children

Over 1.1 million children are incarcerated globally (UNICEF estimate, 2009), and the vast majority of torture cases occur in prisons, police stations, or police vehicles. For this reason the OMCT prioritizes regular prison monitoring visits to open the door to victim assistance, protection, investigation, and torture prevention. We support and accompany our anti-torture partners in focus countries to monitor child detention centres, provide educational activities and psycho-social assistance, interview children about their situation, and provide legal assistance in cases of abuse.

- In the Philippines: OMCT supported 39 monitoring visits by CLRDC to detention centres near Manila, and accompanied them on 4 of these prison visits during Missions; we documented 29 cases of torture and extra-judicial killings in 2016; and provided direct assistance to 53 victims.
- In Uruguay: OMCT supported 3 prison monitoring visits by IELSUR, including one to an adult detention centre for women.
- In Benin: OMCT supported 12 monitoring visits by ESAM (Cotonou, Porto Novo, Ouidah, Abomey- Calavi, Parakou and Natitingou), and results were shared with juvenile judges in 12 meetings to discuss and denounce cases of torture or ill treatment, and demand the release of children held without trial.



Philippines detention center

MAIN OUTPUTS FOR 2016

Missions and advocacy

> Mission to the Philippines in preparation for CAT Review.

In March 2016, the OMCT undertook a Mission to the Philippines in coordination with Children's Legal Rights and Development Centre. The Mission was undertaken to build momentum and prepare for the CAT's review of the Philippines in April 2016. The goals included, inter alia, to gather updated information for an alternative report to the CAT focusing on the situation of children deprived of liberty; to empower children to participate in the CAT reporting process; and to coordinate with NGOs planning to submit alternative reports to the CAT. The mission included several visits to juvenile detention centres, meetings with governmental authorities and CSOs and a consultation with children formerly deprived of liberty.

> **Mission to Benin and Roundtable discussion with judges and prison officials.** In December 2016, the OMCT undertook a Mission to Benin to promote the creation of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) with a specific dimension to address child rights: the Mission sought to advocate for the clarification of the new Penal Code, specifically for the incorporation of torture as defined in the UN Convention Against Torture, and to undertake a monitoring visit of the Abomey-Calavi civil prison – for which we have received numerous alerts regarding the conditions of detention. During the Mission, the OMCT and ESAM organized a cross-disciplinary training and discussion on international standards to protect children deprived of their liberty from torture and ill-treatment with judges, police, and prison personnel. The discussion focused more specifically on their respective responsibilities to reduce pre-trial detention, using it only as a last resort, and for the authorities to agree to and implement procedures and recommendations for cases of detention, as issued by the UN Sub-Committee for the Prevention of Torture following its visit in 2016.

Reports and publications

> Report on the Philippines to the UN Committee Against Torture.

In early 2016, the OMCT, in collaboration with its local partner the CLRDC, drafted and submitted a joint Alternative Report to the CAT in preparation for its Review of the Philippines, which took place in spring 2016. This submission was based significantly on our sustained country project on protection of children deprived of liberty from torture and ill-treatment, established by the OMCT in cooperation with the CLRDC (please [see](#) the report).

> Position paper on Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility (MACR) in the Philippines.

Also through 2016, the OMCT supported the CLRDC in its compilation of a joint report submitted to the Committee on Justice (Sub-Committee on Correctional Reforms) of the House of Representatives in the Philippines. This paper, backed by years of CLRDC experience with children deprived of liberty in the Philippines, makes a strong, evidence-based case that the minimum age of criminal responsibility should not be lowered to 9 years old, and advocating for full implementation of the juvenile justice law.



Photo: Osia ZANNOU

Other highlights from 2016

> **Child and Family Support Groups in Uruguay and the Philippines.** In 2016, the OMCT continued to support the release of children from prison, and to enable psychosocial and group support for families of children deprived of liberty. Such groups help families to cope with and aid children emerging from detention in Uruguay and in the Philippines. One such group in Uruguay is now registering as an independent civil society organisation. It benefits from support and space through another OMCT success (with our local partner IELSUR): the creation of a new institution, INISA, mandated to support families of children in prison for the first time. In the Philippines, the OMCT and its local partner CLRDC also provided legal and psycho-social assistance in 53 individual cases of abused children, including referrals to safe houses and psychological assistance to recover from the trauma of torture.

> **CSO Access to CRC in Review of Benin.** Following a report to the UN Child Rights Committee (CRC) in 2015, the OMCT enabled access to CSOs from Benin during the country's Periodic Review by the CRC in 2016, allowing them to directly brief the Committee on the situation in Benin. Brandishing direct evidence from prison visits and interviews with children, the OMCT and ESAM succeeded in our endeavours as the UN Committee concluded that Benin failed to comply with the Convention. The violations in Benin were especially severe because of its on-going detention of children with adults, which frequently leads to violence – including sexual abuse – against children ([see the appeal](#)).

> **Brazil: 11 children killed in prison riots – the OMCT and GAJOP prompt the Inter-American Commission to react.**

In October, 11 children were killed during two prison riots in Pernambuco State - one riot directly provoked by prison officials fomenting violence between groups of detainees. Testimonies suggest that they even encouraged a beating session with iron bars. The OMCT and its local partner GAJOP – which had just visited the prison two weeks before and had subsequently issued a warning on it – reacted with an urgent appeal for full and independent investigations, for the swift prosecution of officers responsible for any such abuses, for assurances of the safety, physical and psychological integrity of children deprived of liberty in Pernambuco, and for the provision of medical assistance to victims, among other demands ([see the urgent appeal](#)). One week later, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) took up our intervention and issued a broad condemnation of this violence. They demanded investigations into the deaths and the perpetrators, as well as any authorities who may have been responsible ([see the IACHR reaction](#)). The OMCT and GAJOP continue monitoring these cases.

SOS-TORTURE NETWORK

THE SITUATION

Lasting change requires the empowerment and safety of local actors to fight torture in their societies. This is why the SOS-Torture Network is at the heart of the OMCT. These actors are the ones closest to help and assist victims, to document and report on torture, to engage authorities on reforms or to mobilize their societies for justice and a world without torture.

Initially a discrete group when the OMCT was first created, it comprehends today over 200 members as a strong global movement. It operates across the world overcoming all regional, cultural and religious divides. It secures major victories in the fight against torture and has become a powerful agent for change.

But this network needs support ... to fight back when the movement is challenged.

Members ask for joint action in their advocacy to amplify their voices, and to ensure capacity, know-how and access to innovative practices in their global network. Members need a voice regionally and internationally in discussions to which they may not have access but that matter to them. Members need to be able to counter global discourses disputing human rights

Governments are restricting the space for our members to act, to access resources, and are using repression when they speak out. Aggressive discourses on counter-terrorism and anti-migration risk altering the global commitment to human dignity, and the growth of populist ideologies are questioning the legitimacy of anti-torture causes worldwide.

WHAT WE DO

The SOS-Torture Network is the silver thread running through all of the OMCT's work. In 2016, we re-launched a dedicated Network Programme that aims at reinforcing cohesion between our members and at exploiting the expertise enclosed in the Network to the fullest.

The Network Programme ensures better support to members, by facilitating exchange and collaboration among anti-torture activists around the globe. It builds a stronger global anti-torture movement with greater resonance thus multiplying its impacts. Through our Network Programme we:

- Support local struggles and give members a voice internationally;
- Encourage joint action, including joint and collective research to set protection agendas;
- Provide guidance, build capacity and encourage exchange of best practices and expertise;
- Coordinate joint communication and campaigning for change and protection;
- Promote cohesion, maintain membership relations and search for new partnerships.

*"If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together."*

~ African proverb

OUR 2016 – SUPPORT & ACHIEVEMENTS

Changing gears: the OMCT 30th Anniversary Forum - a common agenda against torture

The OMCT 30th Anniversary Forum in November 2016 brought together anti-torture experts from around the world, including the members of the OMCT General Assembly.

Identifying common ground

Over 50 members of our Network and General Assembly members contributed their expertise to the discussion, identifying recurring challenges and best practices, making recommendations on how to encourage greater engagement and improve communication by seeking advice from their peers. Many travelled a long way to benefit from this gathering aimed at allowing members to meet in person and invigorate this movement of like-minded activists. They discussed major challenges, such as the protection from torture in counter-terrorism, the lack of protection across the migration routes, and the wavering commitment to human rights in democratic countries to human rights. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the new Special Rapporteur on Torture, the Chair of the UN Committee Against Torture and the chair of the main EU Human Rights body – its Fundamental Rights Agency – all shared their perspectives with our members on the urgency to counter some of the negative global currents and threats to the anti-torture movement.

Not just talk – a new commitment to act

The discussion resulted in the adoption by the OMCT General Assembly – following a 3-year consultative process – of a new strategy to strengthen OMCT's role in protecting partners, acting as a collective voice on torture. It sets out an ambitious agenda, building new collective work as a network to counter torture in counter-terrorism, migration and torture, and centrally to reinforce our efforts to work together to end impunity for torture.

Not just all work, also some play

After several days of discussions and exchanges, members were offered the opportunity to converse informally at a 30-year anniversary celebration hosted by the City of Geneva at the Palais Eynard. Festivities included a recollection of OMCT history by the OMCT's Presidents and a call to action to defend our liberties and values by Christiane Hessel, wife of the late Stéphane Hessel. The highlights featured a live concert by French singer Louisy Joseph and poem reading by OMCT goodwill ambassador Noémie Kocher and Swiss actress Anne Richard. This trio also spoke out against torture in a dedicated interview subsequently posted [online](#).



A growing movement – welcome to our new members

The OMCT is proud to announce five new members in its global SOS-Torture NETWORK. All five are among the leading and finest organisations in the fight against torture in their regions:

> Nota Bene (coordinator of the Tajik Coalition Against Torture) - Tajikistan

Established in 2009, it is one of the first human rights think tanks in Tajikistan. It is considered one of the leading anti-torture organisations across the former Soviet Union. It coordinates the Tajik Coalition Against Torture, a coalition of 11 NGOs and eight Human Rights activists who all joined forces in 2011 to combat torture, to help survivors obtain justice and reparation and to ensure accountability for those responsible for their suffering. Such a model of coalition is inspiring partners in the region and beyond to unite in the fight against torture, ensuring a greater protection of anti-torture actors. It has achieved key successes, including multiple criminal convictions for torture despite an extremely challenging environment.

> SOS-Torture Burundi - Burundi

Active since the 2015 electoral crisis, SOS-Torture Burundi documents human rights violations such as torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention through the collection of testimonies from victims and ordinary citizens, human rights defenders and state agents. SOS-Torture is a rare actor in making sure that information on torture is known and distributed widely. It provides legal assistance to refugee victims of torture and other human rights violations in neighboring countries, and represents victims in international proceedings, including in the ICC. It is today the main voice in the fight against torture in Burundi.

> COFAVIC (Comité de Familiares de las Víctimas) – Venezuela

Dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights. Created in 1989 after the government violently repressed a demonstration leaving 600 people killed, COFAVIC advises and supports the victims of violations of the right to life, to physical and emotional integrity, to personal freedom and to a due process, as well as helping their loved ones. The OMCT has worked for years with COFAVIC in preventing torture in Venezuela. We are proud to work with the principal voice for human rights in the country at a critical juncture where independent defenders of human rights are needed more than ever.

> CPTRT (Centro de Prevención, Tratamiento y Rehabilitación de las Víctimas de la Tortura) – Honduras

Created in 1995, CPTRT works for the prevention of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments through a holistic approach that includes research, medical, psychological and legal assistance to surviving victims and their families. The CPTRT provides vital services and support to victims and is a prime actor in the fight against torture despite the serious threats against human rights defenders in the country.



Armel Niyongere, President, SOS-Torture Burundi, Rwanda (from exile)
Photo ©point-of-views.ch

> **UDEFEFUGUA (Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos) – Guatemala**

Created in 2000, it provides support to human rights defenders in Guatemala and in Central America. It investigates and denounces threats and attacks against defenders, provides legal and psychological support and helps empower human rights activists through security workshops, networking and trainings. It publishes regular reports, as well as thematic studies to raise public opinion awareness about the challenges faced by human rights defenders. UDEFEFUGUA has been a partner of the OMCT in its anti-torture and human rights defenders work for many years.

Our advocacy support - giving a voice where it matters

We strive to help members in getting out and promoting the right messages, targeting the right audiences at the right time, and using the right combination of platforms to expose government attempts to sweep torture under the carpet. To that end, every little step counts. We help members in remote locations, less familiar with international mechanisms, or when their country escapes attention it may deserve. We act where they are at risk of reprisals for their actions. We make sure that their voices are heard and their concerns are duly considered.

> **Mobilizing the United Nations holding states to account**

Over 2016, the OMCT supported its local members and partners from 27 countries at the United Nations level, by exposing cases or situations of torture including in Azerbaijan, Brazil, Burundi, Cambodia, Colombia, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Libya, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Spain, Sri-Lanka, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Togo Tunisia, and Venezuela.

The OMCT submitted with its members and partners **11 authoritative reports** on torture to UN treaty bodies, convened **10 public events** to raise the awareness on key human rights concerns in partner countries on the margins of the UN Human Rights Council, and issued **19 statements** or submissions to ensure that partners' concerns were heard and taken up with international protection mechanisms and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Our support does not end there. The OMCT supports local members in their domestic struggles, for example when new laws are discussed or States pursue policies that pave the way to torture. In 2016, the OMCT has supported members from an additional 12 countries in responding through statements, submissions, or presswork to such situations.



Babloo Loitongbam, Executive Director, Human Rights Alert, India
Photo ©point-of-views.ch

> OMCT Europe – Mobilizing support, preventing down sliding

The European Union is today among the main global players promoting human rights worldwide. Yet navigating the EU institutional setting is demanding and requires sustained engagement. Accessing the right people at the right time to raise concerns over torture can be challenging. In 2016, the OMCT reinforced its office in Brussels (OMCT Europe) to address those needs and to offer a better platform to our members. Today, the office includes two permanent staff members, dedicated interns, and is supported on a pro bono basis by Peter Zangl, former Director General of the European Commission, to ensure our partners' needs get heard in Brussels.

Countering the fading commitment:

In 2016 the OMCT was one of the leaders in a joint NGO effort to accept the European External Action Service (the EU Foreign Service) to designate their annual human rights meeting on the fight against torture. The OMCT advised on the main themes, which member organisations should participate, and the OMCT's opening address and its recommendations that it provided are largely reflected in the final report. This is important to prevent any down-sliding of EU commitment to the fight against torture and allows the OMCT to engage EU delegations to support anti-torture reforms.



Leyla Yunus, Director, Institute of Peace and Democracy, Azerbaijan
Photo ©point-of-views.ch

Getting concerns taken seriously:

The OMCT supports defenders in partner organisations in addressing EU institutions and actors to ensure not only that they are briefed about pressing human rights concerns, but also that the EU is committed to its declared policies. In 2016, we raised concerns in human rights dialogues and interventions by the EU Parliament and raised the fight against torture as a consideration in trade or other negotiations with third countries.

Interventions focused on Bangladesh, Pakistan, Mexico, Colombia, Honduras, Guatemala, Kenya, the DRC, Tajikistan and Egypt. These interventions can have a direct effect, for example on the scope of human rights dialogues in Mexico and the conclusions it adopts. We also ensured that EU institutions meet with the families of detained human rights defenders from the country. As a direct result, various EU institutions took action on their cases.



Stephanie Brewer, Attorney, Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez, Mexico; Photo ©point-of-views.ch

Joint campaigning to better convince the public

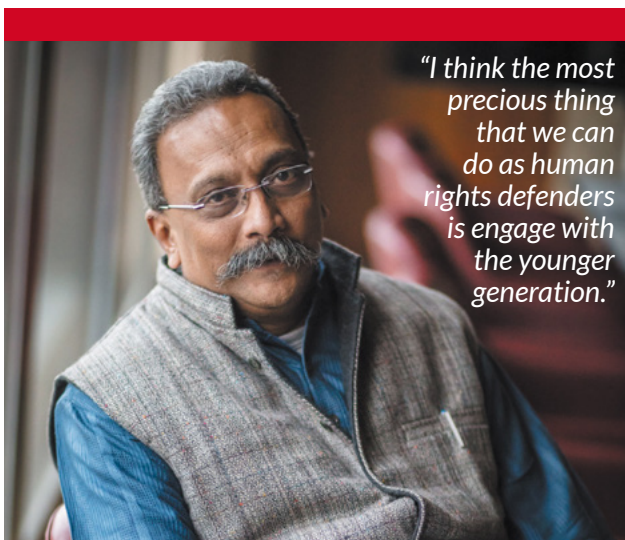
Whenever possible, the OMCT complements these activities with the production of press releases, social media conversations, media engagement and strategies to ensure that our members' demands and denunciations stand out within the noisy arena of advocacy messages competing for public attention.

Plus, on top of its general media and outreach work with members, the OMCT spearheads and runs two global campaigns a year with and for its members: one on December 10th for the International Human Rights Day, and one on June 26th for the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

International Human Rights Day

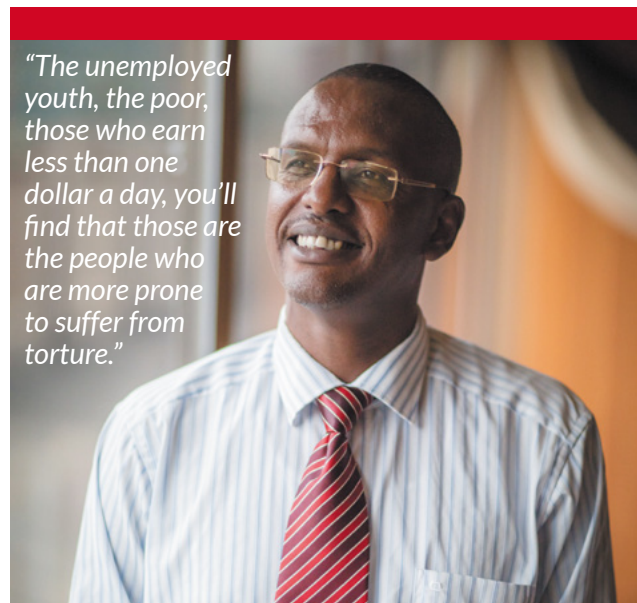
Last year, the OMCT launched an online campaign showcasing many human rights defenders and NGO leaders who put their lives on the line in order to stop human rights violations in their countries. It was based on an impactful video we invite you to share on social media so that more people can understand the concrete sacrifices involved in fighting for the rights of others. The campaign kicked off on December 10th 2016 with OMCT's newly elected President Hina Jilani, explaining: "We owe human rights defenders, the heroes of human rights". The campaign then featured nine other human rights defenders so as to "occupy the space" for a total of 10 days:

- Azerbaijan: Leyla Yunus: "[Defending human rights: A way of life](#)"
- Colombia: Gustavo Gallón: "[Striving for peace, human rights and justice](#)"
- India: Henri Tiphagne: "[Engaging youth to combat injustice and discrimination](#)"
- Philippines: Rosemarie Trajano: "[Defending people's rights is a risky job but someone's got to do it](#)"
- Kenya: Samwel Mohochi: "[A message to torturers and a lesson to society that violence is unjust](#)"
- Burundi: Armel Niyongere: "[A duty to protect the voiceless in conflict-ridden Burundi, even in exile](#)"
- Mexico: Stephanie Brewer: "[Holding the ground in the fight for justice to end a history of violence](#)"
- India: Babloo Loitongbam: "[Fighting deep-rooted impunity and ethnically discriminatory laws](#)"
- Mexico: Olga Guzmán Vergara: "[Breaking the human rights bubble for everyone to understand](#)"



"I think the most precious thing that we can do as human rights defenders is engage with the younger generation."

Henri Tiphagne, Executive Director, People's Watch, India
Photo ©point-of-views.ch



"The unemployed youth, the poor, those who earn less than one dollar a day, you'll find that those are the people who are more prone to suffer from torture."

Samwel Mohochi, Attorney, Supreme Court of Kenya, Kenya
Photo ©point-of-views.ch

FIGHTING TORTURE IN TUNISIA

THE SITUATION

Since September 2011, the OMCT Office in Tunisia has been accompanying authorities and civil society alike, in an effort to strengthen their capacity to combat torture, assist victims, and end impunity.

A transition struggling to be realized

The year 2015 was mired by a series of terrorist attacks. The security environment remained fragile this past year, with the prolongation of the state of emergency, abuses and violations of fundamental freedoms and the reintroduction of a discourse tending towards the justification of the use of torture in the context of the fight against terrorism.

Despite this recent tendency, new steps were taken in 2016 in the fight against impunity and for the prevention of torture. Indeed, in spite of numerous obstacles, the transitional justice process reached important and symbolic milestones. One of these milestones was the holding of the first public hearings on crimes and violations of human rights, an important step towards the construction of a national memory. These hearings raised public awareness of the prevalence of torture and ill-treatment during the former regime and its continuation after 2011, as well as the need to address it urgently.

WHAT WE DO

True to the philosophy of the OMCT, our team in Tunisia works in constant collaboration with both local civil society organisations and relevant public agencies in order to ensure optimal coordination in the areas of outreach, advocacy and assistance. Our activities in Tunisia focus on (1) direct support to victims of torture and ill-treatment, (2) advocacy and technical assistance to encourage legislative and institutional reform, and (3) public awareness-raising.



OUR 2016 IMPACTS

The right to a lawyer during police custody: a success, step by step

OMCT commended the entry into force on 1 June 2016 of the new reform to police custody. Now the maximum duration of pre-trial detention has been lowered from 72 to 48 hours. Moreover, all accused persons now have the right to access a lawyer from the moment of their arrest, greatly reducing the de facto risk of torture and ill-treatment. Despite the adoption of this reform, many challenges remain for its effective implementation. Bearing in mind that longstanding practices are difficult to fight, the OMCT continues to be actively engaged with key stakeholders such as lawyers, magistrates and members of the police, and to exchange information on the new reforms in order to ensure they are understood and respected in daily practice.

The INPT continued to develop in 2016

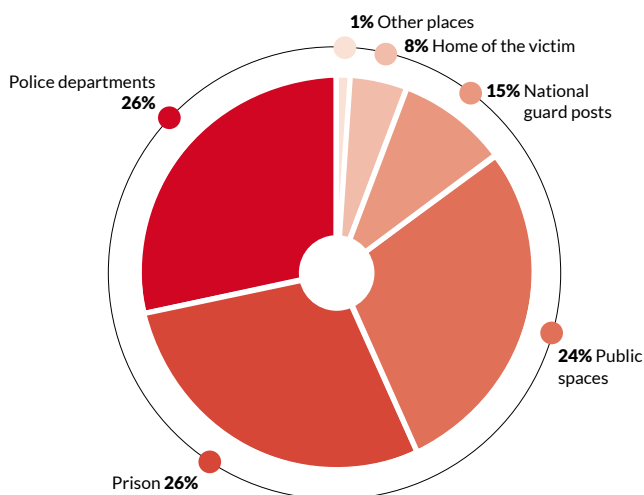
The OMCT, together with its partners from civil society and international organisations, has continued to support and encourage the establishment of the National Commission for the Prevention of Torture (Instance nationale pour la prévention de la torture - INPT). These advocacy efforts have resulted in the election of 16 members of the Commission by the Tunisian Parliament (Assembly of Representatives of the People) in March 2016. Tunisia has thus become the

first country in the Arab world to create such a mechanism following the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. As the political support to establish such a mechanism started slowly, the INPT in the meantime has carried out a number of training sessions with technical partners as well as other activities. These efforts must be maintained so that the members of the Commission can fulfil their mandate in the most optimal way possible. The OMCT actively accompanies the INPT with technical assistance and regular exchanges on the realities in the field, particularly on individual cases.

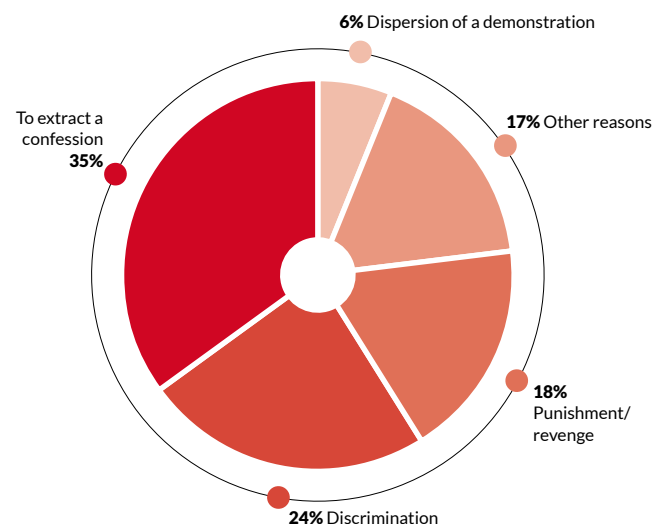
The CAT examines Tunisia's long awaited periodic report

In early 2016, the Tunisian Government presented the 3rd periodic report by Tunisia to the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT). On this occasion, the OMCT, together with 12 partner organisations from Tunisian civil society, submitted a shadow report and proposed 31 recommendations to the State, 16 of which were picked up and reflected in the CAT Concluding Observations. The OMCT and its partners also organised an open live broadcast of the deliberations at the United Nations in the Rio Cinema in the centre of Tunis on 20 April 2016. Over 80 participants followed the presentations and live coverage with great interest. Ever since, the OMCT has been regularly publishing information on social media informing them on the status of implementation of the recommendations of the Committee by the State.

Where violations take place*



Reasons for violations*



* The rates are based on a sample of 171 beneficiaries aided by the SANAD program between 2013 and 2016 .

DIRECT SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS

SANAD Centres

The program for direct victim support is implemented through the SANAD support centres located in Kef and Sidi Bouzid, and coordinated from the OMCT Office in Tunisia. These centres provide legal, psychosocial and medical support to victims of torture, ill-treatment and State violence. The programme is also open to family members and close friends of the victims.

In the year 2016 alone, SANAD was able to provide support to 36 new beneficiaries raising the number of beneficiaries to a total of 171 persons. The support is tailored to respond to each individual's needs in parts of Tunisia where such support is non-existent or lacking capacity to provide such assistance. The SANAD centres also engage proactively in advocacy and networking, most notably with and between the various professional groups and members of civil society.

Self-support groups:

Since 2016, a rehabilitation activity centred around group participation has been integrated into the SANAD program, developed in cooperation with the UK-based organisation "[Room to Heal](#)". This activity, carried out with a group of victims and/or their close network of support, contributes to breaking down the isolation in which they so often live. These first self-support groups brought together mothers of SANAD beneficiaries in detention in Tunis, Kef and in Sidi Bouzid. The group sessions are led by coordinators from the OMCT

SANAD Centres, together with psychologists from Centres of Defence and Social Integration (Centres de défense et d'intégration sociale – CDIS) affiliated with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The exchange and sharing of experiences in these sessions achieve significant results at a psychological level by helping participants to better understand, in a society where they often feel marginalised.



Advancing direct assistance in Tunisia

The SANAD teams pioneer comprehensive direct assistance in Tunisia and are constantly re-evaluating and improving our services in order to remain centres of excellence for tailor-made victim support and holistic rehabilitation. The annual publication of a report enables the centres to continuously analyse

their services and to make recommendations based on their fieldwork. Indeed, the [2016 report](#) focuses on the analysis of legal cases, in order to decipher which reasons and mechanisms contribute to the persistence of impunity for the crimes of torture and ill-treatment.



ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

Portraits telling stories

The photographic exhibition entitled “Sous le Jasmin” (“Under the Jasmine”) was created in 2013 by photographer Augustin le Gall, in close partnership with the OMCT. The exhibition was completed with two new portraits of young Tunisians who have suffered brutal and arbitrary violence at the hands of the State. The exhibition was shown in August 2016 during the summer festival in Ezzahra (a neighbourhood in the South of Tunis), where visitors had the chance to discuss the impact of torture on society with local artists and intellectuals, and then again in October in a gallery in Sousse. Since any country’s history and experiences deserve to be known outside its borders, “Sous le Jasmin” was exhibited in Paris in March, in the framework of the [Paris Human Rights International Film Festival](#) and, following the request of the association of Tunisians in Catalonia, to Barcelona in December.



Breaking taboos and barriers: Prisoners deprived of their liberty, but not of their rights

The OMCT has continued its work with prisoners, by maintaining and reinforcing its cooperation with Tunisian prison authorities (DGPR). To do this, a series of initiatives have been created to raise

awareness about the respect of the rights of prisoners, as well as to foster the improvement of detention conditions.

For the second consecutive year, the OMCT organised film screenings in five prisons and one youth correction centre, in collaboration with the Carthage film festival ([Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage – JCC](#)) accompanied by an open exchange between detainees, film directors and actors. On the initiative of Lina and Sadok Ben Mhenni, the OMCT launched a new activity in cooperation with prison administration by collecting books for detainees in Tunisian prisons. Citizens and associations have both contributed to the significant success of this activity, by donating over 15.000 books and newspapers throughout 2016. The first books were distributed in the prisons of Grand Tunis at the end of the year.

The outdoor photographic exhibition “Making peace”: a first in Tunisia!



In cooperation with the International Peace Bureau and in coordination with the OMCT, the Swiss Embassy put together the exhibition “[Making peace](#)” in the pedestrian area of the main avenue in the capital Tunis between May and August 2016. The exhibition continued to travel for another three months to Sfax, as part of the initiative “Sfax, 2016 capital of Arab culture”. Issues related to peace are illustrated through 120 photos taken by photographers from all over the world, including Tunisia, between 1914 and 2015, also paying tribute to the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Tunisian National Dialogue Quartet.

Launching the campaign “No to terrorism. Yes to human rights”.

The official and public discourse within the framework of fighting terrorism frequently questions the necessity to respect fundamental rights and individual liberties. The OMCT together with partner organisations aims to demonstrate the importance of respecting human rights when fighting terrorism and reinforcing security measures to the broader public and decision-makers alike. Through this 2016 advocacy campaign entitled “No to terrorism. Yes to human rights”, the OMCT advanced its arguments to sway the public opinion. Thought-provoking cartoons, a video message from Tunisian celebrities and video testimonies of Tunisian citizens were distributed to a wide public via different social networks.

THE HUMAN STORY

Fatima

Fatima, a woman of about sixty, was leading a peaceful life in the town of Tejerouine. During the night of 19 July 2014, at around 4 o'clock in the morning while she and her husband were asleep, her world turned upside down: the couple were blinded by searchlights and deafened by shouting and the brandishing of weapons. They were ordered to put their hands in the air. Fatima obeyed without understanding what was happening, and still was shot at close range. She collapsed, hit by two bullets in her left shoulder and thorax.

This nocturnal raid was carried out by the special anti-terrorist brigade, who were searching for a particular suspect. It then turned out that the intervention should never have taken place: Fatima's apartment had been targeted due to bad localisation coordinates. Despite their proven error, the Tunisian State refused to cover the costs of Fatima's medical care. The OMCT, via its SANAD centre in Kef, then stepped in to help, seeking the support of the Ministry of Health, without success. These efforts have not been in vain: a solution was found, thanks to the Director of the hospital, who graciously accepted to provide the care. Today Fatima has physically recovered and is little by little getting her life back again.

Jamel

Jamel worked as a guard in a pharmacy in Dahmani, a town in the Northwest of Tunisia, where he lived with his wife and two young children. One night in August 2016, while he was at work, he was informed that his brother had been involved in an altercation not far away. Jamel rushed straight over and tried to peacefully intervene to end the scuffle, as witnessed by several people present at the scene. Then police officers arrived and intervened, dragging Jamel by force into a van and, despite the fact that he was restrained, severely beating him. The following day, he was taken to the emergency services at the hospital in Tejerouine, in a comatose state. The police denied all responsibility.

Jamel was in a coma, provoked by severe head trauma, for a total of 4 months. During this time, his family, who were already in a severe state of shock after the events, had no income. Jamel's wife decided to file a complaint and two police officers were arrested. The OMCT, via its SANAD centre in Kef, has been intervening since September 2016 at the request of the victim's family, by facilitating access to medical assistance, providing legal aid to Jamel's family, and supporting Jamel's wife in finding employment. Jamel has not yet fully recovered, and is suffering from serious cognitive difficulties. Thanks to the OMCT, he continues to receive care from specialist doctors, and his condition is gradually improving.

CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE PROGRAMME



162 out of 193 UN Member States have ratified the United Nations Convention Against Torture (hereafter, the Convention) - thus agreeing in principle that 'nothing can justify torture, under any circumstances'.

But in practice, in many of these same countries, torture continues as usual, impunity reigns, and victims are left without recognition, or reparation. The challenges are multiple. They range from situations of pervasive use of torture as part of state repression, or weak legal and judicial systems, including the absence of laws criminalising torture, lacking control over police or prison services. Whatever the situation, the result is often the same for those most marginalized in society: abuses with impunity.

When reporting to and being reviewed by the United Nations Committee Against Torture, States are often dishonest, or selective or fail to reveal the reality. They try to minimize acts of torture, to sweep cases under the rug, and some countries simply don't report at all.



Gustavo Gallón, Director, Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, Colombia
Photo ©point-of-views.ch

WHAT WE DO

We bring standards home, where they matter. States are responsible for the majority of torture cases that take place; and yet it is also States that are bound by the Convention to eradicate torture. So who ensures the accountability of the State?

It is anti-torture organizations that are the prime actors in the fight for State accountability. These organisations have united in the OMCT's global SOS Torture Network to better help victims, document acts of torture, and advocate for change. They are the true leaders in bringing the veracity of situations to the attention of the United Nations Committee Against Torture.

The OMCT Convention Against Torture Programme mobilizes these actors across the globe and unites them to ensure impact and State compliance. In 2016 alone, we supported those working on the frontlines of the struggle against torture in 17 countries, providing support, mentoring and joint advocacy to bring standards home.

The OMCT supports local anti-torture organisations worldwide to collect first hand and authoritative information on torture in their countries - information that is often difficult to obtain because torture happens in secret and States seek to hide it. By supporting their safe travel to Geneva to brief the members of the UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) in person, the OMCT ensures that the UN gets a realistic picture of the situation and can issue stronger and more specific recommendations.

But it only starts here. We then push for those recommendations to be implemented back home. We use high-level missions, joint campaigns, and trainings in-country. We accompany local organisations in documentation of cases, improvement of anti-torture laws, and monitoring of prisons and in engaging governments on reforms. And we litigate, and win, cases. Where the UN fails victims we advocate for it to adopt better standards. We maintain this holistic support to the global anti-torture movement through a constant charge to a circuit of advocacy, documentation, empowerment, training, standard-setting, campaigning, and justice-seeking.

And this approach achieves results.

OUR 2016 IMPACTS

New penal code passed in Togo: a strengthened fight against impunity for torture

After years of advocacy, including getting effective CAT Recommendations and following-up with intensive in-country advocacy by the OMCT and our local partner CACIT (Collectif des Associations Contre l'Impunité au Togo), the Togolese parliament adopted a new Penal Code in 2016. This Code not only includes a better definition of torture, but also ensures there will be no statute of limitations, bringing the country's legal standards in line with the United Nations Convention Against Torture. This milestone means that any and all allegations of torture, as well as other cases of ill-treatment – no matter when they took place – can now be brought to court. We are now working with CACIT to bring those cases to justice.

Mobilization of anti-torture organisations with the UN: better UN recommendations

The victory in Togo above was aided greatly by **one** recommendation from the UN that the OMCT and local organisations requested and got. Well, last year we got **scores** of such recommendations. Three times per year, the CAT reviews States' compliance with the UN Convention Against Torture. Where there was no participation or recommendations from local anti-torture organisations, the CAT recommendations were often general, or weak, or did not even mention critical issues. Thanks to the OMCT's mobilization of anti-torture organisations with the UN, such Reviews are a thing of the past: in 2016, the OMCT and local anti-torture partners got 111 of our recommendations taken up directly by the UN.

Non-reporting States: getting closer

Bangladesh ratified the Convention against Torture in 1998, but it has never reported to the CAT; Ivory Coast ratified in 1995, has never submitted a State Report to the CAT, but in 2016 year took the first step toward it; Pakistan ratified in 2008 but had not submitted a report, until last year. The OMCT is engaged in sustained, intensive, in-country projects with local partners in all three countries. And it is showing results. Pakistan submitted its first State Report on the eve of 2016 after repeated missions and advocacy by the OMCT and its local partner, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). After years of advocacy and joint work

by the OMCT with the Mouvement Ivoirien de Droits Humains (MIDH), Ivory Coast finally submitted to the first step in the Reporting process in 2016; almost all of OMCT's recommendations were reflected in the CAT's Report. And while in Bangladesh on mission with local partner Odhikar, we were promised a State Report by the Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. Working together with local organisations, we have initiated the dialogue. Then we move to compliance.

Ensuring engagement – even on countries in crisis: Burundi, Turkey and Honduras

The OMCT sees an important need for **coalition-building**. Forced to flee Burundi as the political crisis there has deepened, many human rights defenders and activists have continued their work, documenting violations and seeking the protection of human rights of Burundians while in exile, or in hiding. In December 2015 the CAT requested the Burundian government to submit a Special Report under Article 19 paragraph 1 of the Convention Against Torture. The OMCT's response was to build a coalition of Burundian human rights workers and enable their full participation in this special CAT process. The output: a strong and robust report by civil society organisations to contrast with the Burundian State's minimization of the crisis. The outcome: the CAT has adopted very strong recommendations and repeatedly called on the Burundian government to ensure that no member of Burundian civil society is subjected to reprisals for cooperating with the CAT. The Coalition continues its work documenting and reporting on often quite extreme violations, and mobilizes using the findings of the Committee Against Torture.

In 2016, the OMCT provided similar support to anti-torture defenders from Turkey, training them to report effectively to the UN Committee Against Torture and supporting them to draw international support in a dramatically deteriorating situation. In Honduras we helped in the creation of an anti-torture coalition, ensuring that their voices be heard at the UN on widely neglected situation on the international scene, with acts of torture, impunity and the killing of human rights activists. We pursue and continue to work with our partners to improve those situations and challenge the conversion of torture to a 'new normal'.

OUR MAIN OUTPUTS FOR 2016

Missions

> **Two Missions to Bangladesh, two good results:** Both missions, organized with OMCT Network Member Odhikar, advocated for the submission of Bangladesh's first county report to the CAT, trained lawyers and human rights activists on documenting cases of torture and using UN Mechanisms, and mobilized public opinion against torture. During the second, a high-level mission led by former OMCT Secretary General Mr. Eric Sottas, Mr. Anisul Huq, a Bangladeshi politician serving as Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs in the Cabinet of Bangladesh, openly and directly committed to preparing and submitting the first Report of Bangladesh to the CAT. Advocacy during this mission helped to secure the later release of 81 year old journalist Shafik Rehman, held without charges for having published stories criticising the authorities ([see the advocacy statement](#)).

> **Mission to Pakistan, December 2016:** The OMCT undertook a mission to Pakistan to prepare for the upcoming CAT Review, including a Symposium on Civil Society Engagement with the Committee Against Torture, both organized with the OMCT's local partner the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP).

> **High Level Mission to Ivory Coast, March 2016:** A mission to the Ivory Coast was carried out by Ms. Aminata Dieye, OMCT Executive Council member and long-time anti-torture expert from Senegal, Mr. Mokhtar Trifi, OMCT Vice President, and our local partner MIDH, advocating for prompt submission of the State report to the CAT, and featuring a training workshop for lawyers on documentation of cases of torture and the Istanbul Protocol, international, regional and national case law relating to torture, and international litigation.

> **Mission to Turkey to prepare for CAT Review, March 2016:** The aim of this mission was to prepare local NGOs for the CAT's review of Turkey in April, and to build a national anti-torture coalition in Turkey to maintain a sustained focus on the CAT recommendations. The mission included a Roundtable discussion on CSO's engagement in the CAT reporting process, organised along with the Human Rights Association (IHD) Secretariat in Ankara. This Roundtable significantly improved the quality of the subsequent submitted reports. It also increased the number of CSOs working on the CAT process, and a national anti-torture coalition is now being built thanks to the sustained collaboration among CSOs.

> **High Level Mission and International Forum in Mexico with former CAT Member, January 2016:** Organized with the OMCT Network Member the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH), with the participation of Mr. Eric Sottas, former OMCT Secretary General, the Mission focused on raising awareness and conducting advocacy promoting investigation of torture cases and the adoption of a new General Anti-Torture Law. An International Forum on the investigation, prosecution and sanction of torture and the rights of victims was co-sponsored by the Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN), Due Process of Law Foundation (DPLF), INSYDE, Centro de Derechos Humanos Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez A. C. (Centro Prodh), and the Mexican Collective Against Torture and Impunity (CCTI).



Lawyer's offices in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Reports with first-hand information on torture

> **Special Joint Alternative Report to the CAT on Burundi:**

submitted with a coalition of Burundian human rights NGOs, in the context of the CAT's Special Session on Burundi under Article 19 of the Convention. This report was focused on the profound socio-political crisis in the country, the numerous allegations of summary executions, arbitrary arrests, torture and ill-treatment, including of human rights defenders, journalists and others perceived as supporting the opposition ([see](#) the report). The OMCT and partners made 33 recommendations, of which 12 were directly reflected in the CAT Concluding Observations.

> **Joint Follow-up Report to the CAT on Colombia:** submitted with the Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (CCJ) and the Coalición Colombiana Contra la Tortura (CCCT) focusing on the excessive use of force by law enforcement and military personnel, prison conditions, and redress for victims of torture and ill-treatment ([see](#) the report).

> **Alternative Report to the CAT on Honduras:** submitted with a coalition of Honduran NGOs (UPR Platform / Plataforma EPU), and the International Platform Against Impunity ([see](#) the report, and [see a video](#) interview with Honduran civil society on challenges in the fight against torture). The OMCT and partners made 58 recommendations, of which 16 were directly reflected in the CAT Concluding Observations.

> **Alternative Report to the CAT on Israel:** submitted with the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI) ([see](#) the report). The OMCT and partners made 31 recommendations, of which 13 were directly reflected in the CAT Concluding Observations.

> **Alternative Report to the CAT on Israel:** focusing in particular on ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian children in Israeli military detention centres, and submitted with Defence for Children International Palestine ([see](#) the report). The OMCT and partners made 18 recommendations, and 13 of these were directly reflected in the CAT Concluding Observations.

> **Joint LOIPR Report to the CAT on Ivory Coast:** submitted with the Mouvement Ivoirien de Droits Humains (MIDH), for the Committee Against Torture's List of Issues Prior to Reporting (LOIPR) process, enabling countries which have not previously reported or which have long-overdue reports ([see](#) the report). Of the OMCT and partners' 28 recommendations only three were not reflected at all in the CAT's final LOIPR – the first time for such a success in the OMCT's work on LOIPRs.

> **Joint Follow-up Report to the CAT on Kazakhstan:** submitted with the NGO Coalition against Torture in Kazakhstan, Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, International Partnership for Human Rights and the OMCT ([see](#) the report).

> **Alternative Report to the CAT on Sri Lanka:** submitted with the Global Justice Centre, focusing on the criminalization of abortion (especially in cases of rape, incest, foetal unviability and danger for the mother), on the narrow definition of rape and the poor understanding of sexual violence in the law, as well as on child marriage ([see](#) the report). Unfortunately and surprisingly, not one of these issues was reflected in the CAT Concluding Observations on Sri Lanka.

> **Joint Alternative Report to the CAT on Tunisia:** submitted by the OMCT with a broad coalition of Tunisian partner organisations, bringing together partner organisations from across the political spectrum to focus on the eradication of torture and acknowledge the near total impunity as a continuous challenge ([see](#) the report). Of the OMCT's 31 recommendations, 16 were picked up by the CAT in the Concluding Observations.

MORE HIGHLIGHTS

Access and Advocacy with the UN Committee Against Torture

As CSO Coordinator for the Committee Against Torture, the OMCT enabled access of anti-torture and other human rights organisations to the 57th, 58th, and 59th Sessions of the CAT. The OMCT thus mobilized and enabled CSOs to participate in CSO preparatory coordination meetings, as well as Briefings with CAT members during and around the Reviews of France, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the Philippines, Israel (57th Session), Kuwait, Honduras, Burundi, and Mongolia (58th Session), and on Ecuador, Finland, Sri Lanka, Namibia, Turkmenistan, Armenia, and Cape Verde (59th Session). The OMCT live-tweeted through all country reviews, co-organized the webcasts of all of the reviews (available [here](#)), published three [E-Bulletins](#) in English, French, Spanish and Arabic also available on the [OMCT Blog](#). A notable outcome of the 57th Session was the highly effective reporting to the Committee Against Torture during the entire session, with at least three NGOs addressing the CAT for each private NGO briefing.



Out of the shadow, into the spotlight: raising public awareness of CAT Sessions

Some see the work of UN mechanisms as an 'empty ritual' that takes place in Geneva and stays there. The OMCT fights to counter this perception, seeking to make Sessions visible in-country. The impact is the increased visibility of these sessions, resulting in them being picked up by local media, subsequently forcing governments to respond. The OMCT's screening of and debate on the CAT session in a packed movie theatre in the centre of Tunis with journalists, NGOs, government and prison officials and an interested public, ensured visibility for what is often considered an administrative exercise in Geneva.

1. Live-streaming / web-screenings of the CAT Sessions:

in 2014 the OMCT and other Geneva-based NGOs began enabling live, internet-based broadcasts of the CAT Review. In 2016 the OHCHR (rightly) took on this function and provides this now systematically (please [see the broadcast](#)).

2. Domestic Screening Events: In 2016 the OMCT organized local screenings of the CAT Sessions in-country in Israel, Tunisia and Turkey, convening NGOs, representatives from Embassies in-country, and engaging local media to raise local visibility of UN Review Sessions taking place in Geneva, followed by discussions.

3. Social and traditional media-work: In 2016, the OMCT continued and was able to boost its outreach to both traditional print and broadcast media, as well as to new social media. It works together with its local partners to ensure that it attracts a maximum of attention locally and internationally.

- [Press pick-up](#) on Burundi
- [Press pick-ups](#) on Swiss deportation case

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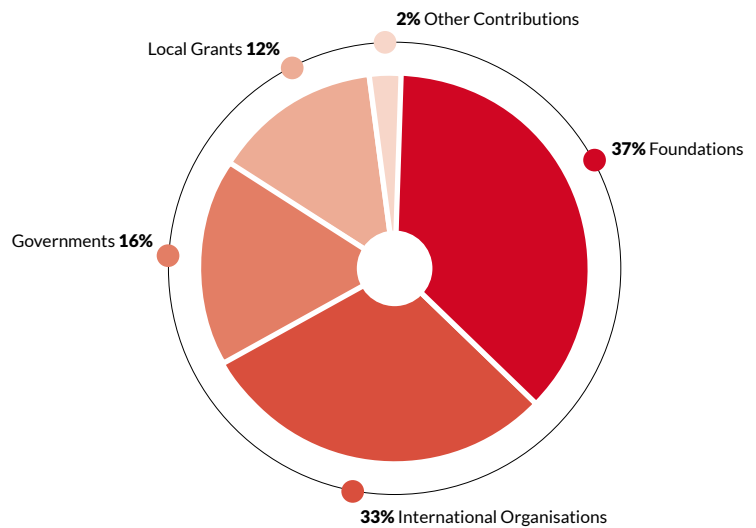
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Local Grants (Cantons and Communes in Switzerland)

City of Bernex
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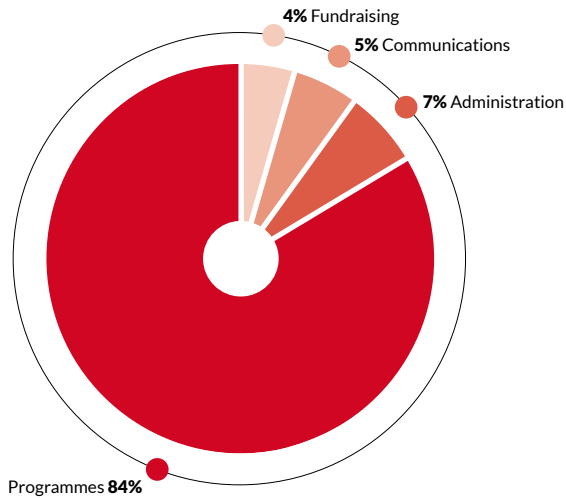
Other Contributions

Private Contributions

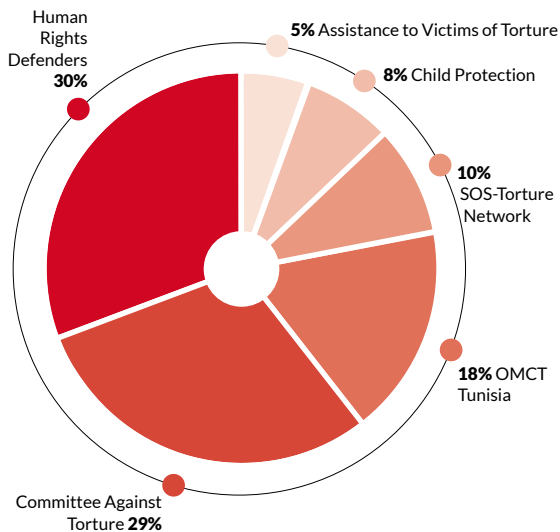


FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2016

Breakdown of expenditure by category



Breakdown of expenditure by programme



Balance sheet from 1 January to 31 December 2016 (CHF)

INCOME		2'818'529.34
Urgent Assistance to Victims of Torture	114'168.79	
Child Protection from Torture	143'358.35	
Human Rights Defenders - Observatory	633'356.49	
Committee Against Torture	585'881.92	
OMCT Tunisia	376'358.74	
TOTAL PROGRAMMES INCOMES	1'853'124.29	
Federal, Cantonal, Communal Grants	168'600.00	
Grants from European Governments	20'000.00	
Grants from Foundations and Others	730'310.35	
Private Donations, bulletins and various donations	46'494.70	
TOTAL INSTITUTIONAL INCOMES *	965'405.05	
EXPENSES		2'822'419.91
Urgent Assistance to Victims of Torture	120'041.21	
Child Protection from Torture	189'899.18	
Human Rights Defenders - Observatory	713'250.30	
Committee Against Torture	679'522.84	
Development of the Network	240'882.44	
OMCT Tunisia	426'328.74	
TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENSES	2'369'924.71	
Fundraising	122'421.37	
Communication	131'884.22	
Administration	198'189.61	
TOTAL INSTITUTIONAL EXPENSES *	452'495.20	
RESULTS BEFORE OTHER INCOMES		-3'890.57
OTHER INCOMES		14'625.90
Other Incomes	14'625.90	
EXCESS OF INCOMES		10'735.33

*Institutional incomes include unrestricted funds from private individual donors, core funding transversal projects, and some funds which are dedicated to specific institutional areas - communications, institutional development, etc. - which are also used for Programme Expenses and assistance to Network Members work.

GOVERNANCE

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Geneva

STABEROCK Gerald, Secretary General

Programmes:

Child Protection Against Torture

BARBARA Carolina, Programme Coordinator

Convention Against Torture

BENNINGER-BUDEL Carin, Programme Director

BUERLI Nicole, Human Rights Adviser

SOLA MARTIN Helena, Human Rights Adviser

Human Rights Defenders

RECULEAU Delphine, Programme Director

Victims Assistance & Network

ANASTASIA Stella, Human Rights Officer

TARDIEU ZIOLKOWSKI Garance, Human Rights Officer

Institutional:

AEBERSOLD Marc, Accountant

BRUMAT Lori, Head of Communications

DEKHISSI Halima, Administrative Assistant

GERASSIMIDIS Yannis, Finance and Fundraising Officer

PILETICH Radosh, Institutional Development Officer

Brussels

Human Rights Defenders

MARTIN ZUMALACARREGUI Miguel, Head of Office

CONSENTINO Chiara, Human Rights Officer

ZANGL Peter, OMCT Representative at the European Union (pro bono)

Tunis

REITER Gabriele, Office Director

Programmes:

Awareness Raising

BELLALI Emyez, Coordinator Awareness raising

Advocacy and Legislative/Institutional Reform

HENRY Camille, Coordinator Advocacy

LAMLOUM Inès, Legal Assistant

MEDDEB Halim, Legal Adviser

MZEM Mohamed, Legal Adviser

Direct Assistance SANAD

KHECHINE Hend, Coordinator SANAD

MLIKI Taoufik, SANAD / Administration and Logistics Officer

SANAD Centre Kef

GATRI Sabrine, Social Coordinator

TALBI Najla, Legal Coordinator

ZOUARI Seiffeddine, Administration and Finance Officer

SANAD Centre Sidi Bouzid

CHOKRI Afef, Social Coordinator

HAFSAOUI Mourad, Administration and Finance Officer

RABHI Houssein, Legal Coordinator

Institutional:

BEN NAYA Rahma, Executive Assistant

PANDYA Nehal, Executive Assistant

TARAOUI Mohamed, Chief of Finance and Administration

Interns & fellows

The OMCT would like to thank all our interns and fellows for generously contributing their time, energy, creativity and good spirits in 2016:

BAKER Zoe; BERNARD Natalene; CARMONA PRIETO Alejandra; CHEANNE Juliette; CHERNI Safa; DE LA PANOUSE Marc; DELANEAU Eliana; FIN Martina; GALLEGOS Laura; GENTET GANOSE Tania; GHRISSA Dhafer; GRANGER Jonathan; HECKMANN Justine; KOROS David; LABBEN Sarra; MANCINI Charlotte; MARUGG Leah; MERCADER VERDES Rosa; MOWBRAY Sean; MUNOZ TORD Nathalie; NAOUAL Myriam; PANDYA Eshani; ROTHFELD Leah; ROUX Camille; SHEA Louisa; SHINE Cormac; TRAVIS May.

CONTACTS

OMCT - International Secretariat

8, rue du Vieux-Billard
P.O. Box 21
1211 Geneva 8, Switzerland

Tel: + 41 22 809 4939
Fax: + 41 22 809 4929
omct@omct.org
www.omct.org

OMCT Europe

Rue Stevin 115
1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: + 32 2 218 37 19
omct@omct.org
www.omct.org

OMCT Office in Tunis

2, avenue de France,
Immeuble le National (Apt. 325)
1000 Tunis, Tunisia

Tel: + 216 71 322 561
Fax: + 216 71 322 562
omct-tun@omct.org
www.omct-tunisie.org

BANK INFORMATION

Post office account

Geneva, CCP 12-5500-1
Holder: OMCT SOS TORTURE

Bank accounts

UBS SA
Agence du Rhône, P.O. Box
1211 Geneva 2
Account No. 279.C8106675.0
Holder: OMCT SOS TORTURE
IBAN: CH91 0027 9279 C810 6675 0
Swift Code: UBSWCHZH80A

LOMBARD ODIER SA
Rue de la Corraterie 11
1204 Geneva
Account No. 88515.00
Holder: OMCT SOS TORTURE
IBAN: CH25 0876 0000 00881 5150 0
Swift Code: LOCYCHGG

**World Organisation
Against Torture (OMCT)**
International Secretariat
P.O. Box 21, 8, rue du Vieux-Billard
1211 Geneva 8, Switzerland

Tel: + 41 22 809 4939
Fax: + 41 22 809 4929
Email : omct@omct.org
www.omct.org

