



## **IRCT global reading on the occasion of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2009**

Twenty-five years ago, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights submitted a draft document to the UN General Assembly. The aim was to give the world an effective tool to help abolish torture. At the time there already existed several declarations and covenants condemning torture and promoting human dignity and rights. But the UN system lacked legally binding obligations to both prevent torture and provide support to torture survivors.

The document submitted to the UN General Assembly Later was the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The General Assembly adopted the Convention and invited States to sign and ratify it. Three years later, on 26 June 1987, the Convention officially came into force.

At present, 146 states have ratified the Convention, thus sending a powerful political message that torture is illegal and has no place in our world. Momentum is also growing around the Convention's Optional Protocol. The Protocol obliges its signatories to create effective measures to prevent torture and ill-treatment in any territory under their jurisdiction, and to establish mechanisms for independent monitoring of places of detention – one of the primary places where torture occurs.

The 26<sup>th</sup> of June has become a moving symbol of our moral, ethical and professional obligations to prevent torture and to ensure the rights of torture survivors and their families. For more than a decade, the world has commemorated 26 June as the occasion of the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. On this day, thousands of individuals and organisations across the globe speak out against torture and demand that torture survivors' needs and rights be fulfilled.

Right now, treatment centres and programmes that are members of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) are jointly raising their voices across the world, reading out this statement.

It is a statement of global solidarity. A statement which shows that no matter where we are and who we are – regardless of ethnic and cultural background, language and religion – we are united against torture and in solidarity with

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and participatory  
status with the Council  
of Europe.*



torture survivors and their families. It is a reminder that every day, people around the world are subjected to torture. But also a reminder that they can, with the appropriate support, rebuild their lives after suffering under torture's cruel hand.

In the years following the 1984 presentation of the draft Convention before the United Nations, there have been dramatic shifts in human rights trends. Twenty-five years ago, many countries were emerging from oppressive regimes that systematically tortured their opponents.

Today torture in some of those countries has been dramatically reduced. But other countries that were previously dedicated to the anti-torture struggle have weakened their stance under the guise of protecting national security. Indeed, several democratic states have directly engaged in or endorsed torture, claiming this fundamental affront to human dignity to be an effective and necessary tool to prevent acts of terrorism.

The challenges are great. A collective, multi-disciplinary effort is needed to combat the widespread, illegal practice of torture against individuals and communities. Today, 25 years after the Convention against Torture was handed to the UN General Assembly, a renewed global commitment to its principles is urgently needed.

We call on all UN institutions to clearly and even-handedly denounce all states practicing torture. And we call on all citizens, communities and grass root organisations to push for universal ratification of the Convention and to ensure that their States abide by it and end the illegal and abhorrent practice of torture once and for all.

This 26 June, we honour the countless girls and boys, women and men who have suffered this terrible crime - those who paid with their lives as well as those who have survived. We pay tribute to their strength and courage. And with our collective voice, we stand together against torture.

Dr Abdel Hamid Afana, IRCT President  
and  
Brita Sydhoff, IRCT Secretary-General

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