

Geneva 08/04/2014

Comments by Catholic Church-related organizations in relation to the Initial Report by the Holy See under article 19 of the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT).

As the Committee against Torture prepares to consider and discuss the above-mentioned Report, the undersigned Catholic civil society organizations and networks, acutely aware of the many forms of inhuman and degrading treatment of people, groups and communities currently prevalent in the world, want to raise the urgent need for a more holistic approach in the protection of individuals, groups and communities. We join in the call for enhanced political will, international collaboration and improved governance to better respond to such situations declared unacceptable by article 5 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Throughout history, the human family has been plagued by attitudes and motivations that gave rise to cruel, degrading, and inhumane treatment carried out by individuals, groups and states. In an increasingly globalized world, with diverse cultures and populations, community-building efforts are essential and should explicitly reject any deliberate act that might inflict severe physical or psychological pain and injury to persons.

Catholic organizations act within the framework of the Catholic Church Teachings that are anchored in the profound understanding of the inherent dignity of every human being. The history and daily work of over a hundred Catholic International Organizations and global networks connecting to many local structures is imbued with the values of solidarity, fraternity and the common good. With such strong motivation we work relentlessly to combat the many forms of violence through a broad range of human promotion and direct actions including humanitarian relief, integral human development, education, the prevention of human trafficking and other forms of abuse and violence as well as for the effective protection and re-integration into mainstream society of its survivors. These activities, carried out together with advocacy against and promotion of alternatives to e.g. the death penalty and other punitive measures, arbitrary detention and deportations, slavery and forced labour, xenophobia and the many forms of prejudice are at times insufficiently valued as to their in depth penetration and enrichment of community building values and their contribution to peace and stability in preventing and condemning all human degrading attitude.

All of these activities, covering so many ways of establishing protection levels, proceed in close collaboration with the structures associated with the Holy See and with the respective hierarchical and pastoral structures associated with the Catholic Church in all parts of the world, on global, regional, national, and local levels.

The constructive and contributive impact of so many Catholic organizations can hardly be fully assessed or pictured: their value is to be found in their continuous presence speaking up for the voiceless and acting with and on behalf of the most vulnerable. On behalf of the social commitment and presence of the many Catholic organizations Caritas Internationalis, the International Catholic Migration Commission, The International Catholic Child Bureau, Jesuit Refugee Service and Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII movement wanted to submit these considerations to highlight how broad their action in the combat against degrading human behavior is of importance and how much it is necessary in any evaluation to include at least a picture of the many efforts done rather than only raising the pointing fingers.

Caritas Internationalis is a global confederation of 164 national Catholic Church-inspired organizations working in humanitarian emergencies, international development, social and health services. With its General Secretariat having been founded and continually located in Vatican City State, it can give direct witness to the determination and dedication of the Holy See to prevent and effectively act upon any allegation of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) within its spheres of influence. With its national member organizations located in each region of the world, the organization helps Catholic Church structures put into practice Catholic social teaching aimed at preventing torture and to effective and professional outreach and care for all persons in need without any distinction based on national or ethnic origin, economic or social class, sex, or religious affiliation. The organization prioritizes defense of the human rights to life and dignity and outreaches in particular to the most vulnerable and marginalized populations of the world.

In the growing discussions on Migration and development worldwide, the International Catholic Migration Commission coordinates global civil society in an attempt to translate the centrality of the human person in terms of rights, equity, social justice and obligations. ICMC advocates for safe, ordered and regular human mobility; develops systemic responses to forced migration and combats international, national and community violence against migrants worldwide including quite specifically the torture of human trafficking. The organization calls attention to the needs of 232 million international migrants, the millions of internally displaced and the refugees who are often easy victims of abuse and degrading attitudes. ICMC calls attention to and promotes the capacity of migrants to contribute toward building up the culture and social structures of both their original and host countries and questions the attitudes and politics in many countries that fuel growing xenophobia, which often motivates arbitrary, cruel and inhumane detention - even of children – as well as deportations.

The International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB-BICE) is a worldwide network of organizations committed to promote and protect the dignity and the rights of the child. Specifically, ICCB projects on juvenile justice, sexual abuse and on the involvement of children in armed conflicts are carried out in accordance with articles 19, 37 and 38 of the

Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles enshrined in the Convention against Torture. They aim at preventing all forms of violence against children, accompanying victims and favoring the adoption and implementation of laws protecting children. In so doing, ICCB also enhances families' and communities' capacity to protect and care for their children. In order to move forward in the eradication of torture and any other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment against children, ICCB also calls for a renewed, strong political will on this matter and for a social mobilization to break the silence and to promote a change in the attitudes and social tolerance of violence.

The Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23), founded in Italy by Fr. Oreste Benzi and present in 25 countries is committed to sharing the life with the most marginalized persons in society and to remove the causes of poverty and injustice. In Italy, the community is on the forefront to combat human trafficking; its members actively reaching out to women enslaved in prostitution and often subjected to violence, humiliation and even torture by their exploiters. APG23' members welcome these women in their family-homes and shelters and help them to be fully reintegrated into society, acquire full autonomy and restore their dignity.

The Volunteers of Operation Dove, the nonviolent civil peace corps of APG23, have been living in the last twenty years with people who suffer from the violence of war and conflicts. Their presence assures more safety, protection and community stability; their nonviolent action fosters reconciliation between the parties. They served in former Yugoslavia, North Uganda, Chiapas, Chechnya, and today also in Albania, Colombia and Palestine-Israel.

In Albania, 'Operation Dove' volunteers daily visit people imprisoned in their own homes because of fear of blood revenge actions. In Palestine-Israel, the APG23 volunteers accompany Palestinian farmers working on lands exposed to attacks or harassment; they monitor the daily escort of some Palestinian children on their way to school after having been repeatedly attacked and injured. Whenever necessary, the volunteers provide a civil escort, using physical interposition in case of aggressions. Finally they collaborate with Israeli associations and human rights activists and foster dialogue between the parties.

In Colombia 'Operation Dove' has been present since 2008, in the San José de Apartadó Peace Community, located in Northwest Colombia, a territory disputed by guerrilla groups, paramilitary and Colombian Army. The volunteers of Operation Dove support the nonviolent choice of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community by sharing poverty and dangers generated by the ongoing conflict. Their international presence contributes to decrease violence and reduce the cases of forced evacuation and assure safety to civil population.

Jesuit Refugee Service provides humanitarian assistance to forcibly displaced persons in over 50 countries throughout the world. All its activities are founded upon the principle of the need to respect the human dignity of all persons. In many parts of the world JRS works with persons detained by states for reasons of migration irregularities and

forcefully advocates against the cruel and inhuman conditions of confinement it encounters in detention centers. In its education programs for refugees and internally displaced persons, JRS emphasizes the need for mutual respect for human dignity to counter the violence which the displaced often encounter in their exile. It advocates locally, nationally and globally against the degradations, which in some cases amount to torture, inflicted on detained asylum seekers and migrants. As is the case with Caritas Internationalis, JRS works closely with and often depends upon local and regional structures of the Catholic Church.

The undersigned organizations highlight again how much the many Catholic organizations are committed in a broad spectrum of actions to preserve human dignity and actively contribute to community peace and stability. They call upon the local, regional, national and international actors to increase their efforts far beyond the present response levels and to develop ways of collaboration and shared responsibility with Catholic actors and civil society to reduce and eliminate all forms of inhuman and degrading treatment.



Caritas Internationalis

Mr. Michel Roy
Secretary General



International Catholic Migration Commission

Mr. Johan Ketelers
Secretary General



The International Catholic Child Bureau

Mrs. Alessandra Aula
Secretary General



Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII

Dr. Rossi Maria Mercedes
Main Representative



Jesuit Refugee Service

Rev. Fr. Michael Gallagher, S.J.
Geneva Representative