

*Check against delivery*

**Committee against Torture**

**62nd Session**



Opening Address by

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Capacity Building and Harmonization Section

Human Rights Treaties Branch

Representative of the Secretary General

**Geneva, 6 November 2017**

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary-General, I declare open and welcome you to the sixty-second session of the Committee against Torture.

In his opening statement to the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council on 11 September 2017, the High Commissioner for Human Rights stressed the fact that the world has grown darker and more dangerous. At the same time, the vision for the work of the Office has become more determined, drawing even more deeply on lessons which come to us from our forebears: “human rights principles are the only way to avoid war and profound misery and deprivation”.

In that context, the principles contained in the United Nations Convention against Torture (the Convention) remain highly relevant today:

- Torture is a crime. It is never allowed nor justified, not even in times of war or in the fight against terrorism;
- Those who commit the crime of torture will be held accountable, anywhere; and
- Victims of torture have a right to rehabilitation and redress.

In order to transform those principles into reality, the permanent work of your Committee is essential and is enriched by the contributions of all other stakeholders, namely States and civil society representatives.

The number of initiatives taking place to combat and prevent torture and ill-treatment is impressive. They come at a crucial time when some country leaders try to weaken the anti-torture narrative and protection framework, as explained in details by the High Commissioner in his address this year at the Annual Grotius Lecture.

Among those welcome initiatives, let me refer to the the Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI), a unique State-driven collaboration which aims to achieve universal ratification of the Convention by the identification of challenges and barriers to ratification and implementation of the Convention; addressing these obstacles through inter-State cooperation, assistance and dialogue; mobilising legal advice and technical assistance to governments at their request; and, building a global platform composed of States, the United Nations, national and international NGOs and experts – including you - to work jointly to achieve the CTI vision. Since the creation of the CTI in March 2014 and following its numerous regional and national events, 8 States have become party to the Convention. The CTI also launched series of Implementation and Training Tools for the Convention, which are practical tools to share good state practices: the first tool is on State strategies to prevent torture, the second tool is on safeguards in police detention, and the first training tool is on investigative interviewing. State reports to

CAT and Concluding Observations of the Committee were extremely important in directing the CTI to make further inquiries on good practices (all tools are available online: <http://cti2024.org/en/cti-uncat-implementation-tools/>). Finally the CTI launched a blog series on States parties to the Convention and its Optional Protocol, with a view to sharing inspiration and experiences with other States considering ratifying those two treaties (the first blog featured Fiji: <http://cti2024.org/en/cti-blogs-2/> ).

Let me also mention the launch in September 2017 of the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade with the aim to end the trade in goods used to carry out torture, at the initiative of Argentina, the European Union and Mongolia during the High Level Week of the United Nations General Assembly 72<sup>nd</sup> session. The Alliance also seeks to control and restrict exports of these goods, monitor trade routes and exchange information in order to put an end to this trade. Our New York Office was closely associated to this initiative. Last month , the

CTI and the European Union held a follow-up side-event to the launch of the Global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade which was attended by the three United Nations anti torture mechanisms, namely your Committee represented by the Chairperson, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and the Special Rapporteur on Torture.

The High Commissioner addressed another CTI high-level event in the context of the United Nations General Assembly in September on “Torture during interrogations – Illegal, immoral and ineffective”. On that occasion, the High Commissioner announced that OHCHR was planning to co-create a Manual on Investigative Interviewing, with the Department of Peacekeeping Operation’s Police Division, for use by United Nations police officers. The CTI and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights were also preparing guidance on investigative interviewing that does not rely on threats and brutality.

Finally on 6 October 2017, following resolution 31/31 of 24 March 2016 of the Human Rights Council, OHCHR convened an inter-sessional seminar on the implementation of effective safeguards to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment during police custody and pre-trial detention. Again this event was preceded by a CTI event on investigative interviewing at Palais des Nations and was attended by the Chairperson of your Committee.

I further wish to inform you that the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture has decided last week to have its 2018 annual expert workshop on the theme: “Access to justice for victims of torture” and the CAT will of course be closely associated to this event.

There is therefore a clear and broad international support from coalitions of States, NGO, UN Human Rights Mechanisms as well as OHCHR to combat the never-ending practice of torture and all

rhetoric to justify it, for instance, in the context of the fight against terrorism.

And obviously you are a key-actor whose recommendations under your reporting procedure, your decisions and views under the individual complaints procedure and your authoritative guidance through your General Comments are guiding international and national stakeholders as well as OHCHR.

Chairperson,

I'd like to address another issue of great importance, which is ratification, reporting and implementation. In his statement to the third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on 16 October 2017, the High Commissioner stressed his determination to do everything in his capacity to ensure comprehensive implementation of recommendations from all human rights mechanisms, including yours.



In that context, he referred in particular to the support provided to the establishment of National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up and therefore to the Treaty Body Capacity Building Programme (TBCBP).

I'm pleased to report that under this Programme, OHCHR worked with Fiji and Sao Tome and Principe which led to ratifications of the Convention against Torture. Together with the CTI, OHCHR advocated with Comoros which ratified the treaty, and efforts are being pursued with Angola and Suriname. The Programme Team participated in sub-regional CTI led events in Costa Rica, Morocco and in the Pacific towards universal ratification but also on reporting and implementation of treaty obligations. Those activities led to the submission of reports by Mauritius, Panama and South Africa to your Committee.

Turning to administrative and resource related issues, with regard to General Assembly resolution 68/268 and the preparations for the 2020 review foreseen under the same resolution on treaty body strengthening, I would like to indicate that the Secretary-General's first report that is being considered during the present GA session in New York has led to a proposal to reallocate the meeting time and human resources allotted to each treaty body, with a considerable increase in resources allocated to bodies examining individual communications. The General Assembly's Fifth Committee will consider the proposal in the coming weeks with a decision expected in December.

On Friday 13 October, your Chairperson addressed the Third Committee of the General Assembly along with other treaty body Chairs. The message for the need of additional resources to the Treaty Bodies System has been strongly voiced, and I am sure that your Chairperson will be able to provide further details.

Before concluding, let me pay tribute to the three Committee members leaving the Committee at the end of this year, namely Mr. Bruni who has spared no efforts to share his unique knowledge and experience as former Secretary of the Committee and then Committee member, Ms. Pradhan-Malla who has brought in particular her gender expertise to the work of the Committee and Mr. Zhang whose wisdom guided the Committee.

Let me conclude by wishing you, on behalf of the High Commissioner, a fruitful and successful session for a full realization of the Convention against Torture.

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