

History

OMCT was founded following consultations between international experts and national human rights NGOs who expressed the importance of national action in the fight against torture. The organisation's structure and working methods remain radically different from those of other international human rights organisations. OMCT's strategy for intervention is indeed based upon the idea that human rights violations must be considered within the local and international context as well as in relation to the actors affected by them, including those who commit abuses as well as those who struggle to bring such human rights violations to an end. Since its inception, OMCT set as its task the provision of support for the actions of organisations in the field, while avoiding substituting itself for them.

The structure of the SOS-Torture network has allowed OMCT to reinforce local activity while favouring the access of national NGOs to international institutions. The member organisations not only exchange information concerning particular situations and cases but also their experience gained while working in the field, their methods of intervention and their own reflections concerning the political, legal, social and economic reforms that are necessary in order to ensure greater respect for human rights. Therefore, this "bottom up" approach enables OMCT's activities and projects to be a true reflection of the needs of a wide spectrum of members of global civil society, from a range of social and cultural backgrounds, and the tools that OMCT's various activities provide to these actors are fine-tuned through consultation in order to enable a more effective and cooperative effort in favour of the rule of law and the upholding of human rights around the world.

Historically, OMCT's activities were centred on the Urgent Campaigns and the Urgent Assistance to Victims of Torture. With time, however, evaluations carried out regarding these two main activities led to the conclusion that although their general impact was extremely positive with respect to the issues addressed, there was a lack in respect to certain aspects of OMCT's work, in particular regarding prevention and the protection of certain groups. In consequence, four thematic activities focusing on Children's Rights in 1992, the Human Rights Defenders in 1995^[1] and the Violence against Women in 1996. Furthermore, OMCT's General Assembly decided in 1991 that the organisation should give strong emphasis to socio-economic issues in the fight against torture. Several seminars on the issue were carried out during the 90s that led to the establishment in 2000 of a permanent activity on economic, social and cultural rights. Finally, in order to have impact on the broader development in countries with a poor human rights record the United Nations Treaty Bodies/Monitoring Protection Mechanisms activity was launched in 2001 to monitor the compliance of States to human rights international instruments that they had ratified.

[1] In 1997, OMCT joined forces with the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) to create the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.
