

## They survived torture. And started patching up their lives again.

**Who are the women and men who overcame true evil through sheer resilience and courage? Here are the stories of five people, among the many that our Victims Fund has been helping to find their way to healing.**

### **Mercedes\*, Mexico**

The Mexican city of San Salvador de Atenco became synonymous with brutal police action against popular protests, and with the torture, including the sexual abuse, of dozens of women, in 2006. **Mercedes\*** was one of them. Despite the public scandal, the perpetrators went free. Together with another 10 women, Mercedes started a long battle for justice. Following action from the OMCT and a local partner, Centro Prodh, the case finally came to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, providing it with high visibility. But the added pressure on the witnesses proved too much for Mercedes, who was still suffering from the long-term trauma of torture. After following sessions with a psychotherapist specializing in victims of torture, with support from the OMCT, Mercedes recovered her strength and was able to testify in front of the Court. In 2018, the Court issued an historic judgement: it found the Mexican State responsible for sexual violence, rape and torture, on the 11 Atenco women. A milestone on the long road against the impunity that usually surrounds the entrenched violence against women.

### **Shah Jalal, Bangladesh**

One night in July 2017, **Shah Jalal** was buying powder milk for his 10-month old daughter, at the end of another long day selling fruit and vegetables on the streets of Khulna, in southwest Bangladesh. This is when policemen grabbed him, accused him of theft, and took him to the police station, where he was severely beaten and summoned to pay 150,000 takas - about 1,800 Swiss Francs - in exchange for his freedom. For a 35-year old slum dweller who could hardly feed his small family, the amount was absurd. Afterwards, the policemen took him to the town outskirts and gouged his eyes with a wrench. His wife, Rahela, found him the following day on the floor of a local hospital, blinded and bleeding from both eyes. The tragedy left the family - Rahela, the baby, and Shah Jalal's mother - destitute. At the request of its local partner Odhikar, the OMCT immediately provided assistance to help the family survive. Local activists helped bring the case to court, but proceedings are slow. The family live in fear, as police are pressuring them to withdraw the case. Still, Shah Jalal is adamant: "I shall never get back my eyes, but I want justice."

### **Willy, Argentina**

Willy had just turned 18 when he was arrested for possessing a small quantity of drugs and sentenced to 16 months in prison. Towards the end of his detention, Xumek, a human rights organisation and OMCT partner, received from an anonymous source a mobile phone. On it, videos showed six prison staff violently kicking Willy, who was lying on the floor in handcuffs, hitting him with their fists, while shouting insults and humiliating him. In 2011, Xumek filed a criminal suit, but the judicial process got bogged down. Willy, who came from a very marginalized background,

returned in prison in 2014, this time for armed robbery. It was only in September 2019 that the six guards were sentenced to 10 years in prison for acts of torture. The acknowledgment of his suffering was a turning point for Willy, who was by then 28 and had finished his second sentence. After spending most of his adult life in prison, he wanted to start a new life with his wife and three-year old son. His dream: open a pizzeria. The OMCT helped the young man buy a pizza truck. Willy is now selling hot pizzas on the streets of Mendoza.

### **Younous, Morocco**

Younous was born in Morocco, but moved as a young man to Afghanistan, where he opened a small business. The 2001 American invasion caught up with him, and he ended up at Guantanamo in 2002. He was never charged with any crime. But during 14 long years, he lived through a nightmare of torture and humiliations. He was finally sent back to Morocco in 2015, nominally a free man - except that he was arrested again on arrival, for five months. The battle to clear his name took another two years, but finally a Moroccan court acquitted Younous of all charges in February 2018. His needs in terms of rehabilitation were extreme. He was broken, both physically and psychologically, plagued by chronic pain and anxiety. It's only thanks to the OMCT that Younous could receive specialized medical care, physiotherapy, and be followed up by a psychiatrist. Today, Younous is a married man, father to a little girl. A survivor who has recovered his emotional balance and rekindled his faith in life.

### **Germaine\*, Togo**



In September 2017, opposition supporters demonstrated in the Togolese capital, Lomé, asking for political change and constitutional reforms. The police crackdown was unforgiving, and demonstrators took refuge in neighbouring houses. At around 3 am, police threw a tear gas canister in Germaine's house, kicked down the front door, and began hitting everyone with sticks and batons. Germaine was beaten, loaded into a police vehicle along with demonstrators and taken to the General Directorate of the Judicial Police (DGPJ), where the beatings continued. Germaine was released after a few days, thanks to the intervention of civil society organisations including OMCT Network member CACIT. She lost her job as a seamstress in a factory, because the beatings had disabled the foot with which she used to activate the heavy factory machine. But Germaine could still sew. With financial support from the OMCT Victims Fund, she set up a sewing workshop and could make a living again.

\*Not their real names

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## **Attachments**

-  Victims report\_French  
3.40 MB
-  Victims Report\_English  
2.80 MB