

Building a framework of understanding through advocacy

The effectiveness of action against the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence is greatly enhanced by a framework of understanding of the links between violations of those rights and violence and the types of action that can be taken to address those links. While progress is being made, much still needs to be done to help ensure that policy makers and institutions are aware of these issues and are ready to take action. Thus, to the extent possible, OMCT seeks to contribute to building this framework of understanding with UN bodies and other institutions such as the European Union.

UN Human Rights Council

OMCT submitted a written statement on the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture and other forms of violence to the 7th session of the Human Rights Council (March 2008) in connection with Item 3, Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Specifically, OMCT recommended that members of the Human Rights Council:

- ensure that policies and programmes by governments, private actors, development institutions and financial institutions are founded on a human rights-based approach and do not exacerbate poverty and inequalities that lead to increased levels of official, criminal or domestic violence;
- request that the UN Special Procedures mandate holders continue to take into account the link between the denial of economic, social and cultural rights and violence in their reports wherever relevant; and
- ensure that the Universal Periodic Review process takes into account the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture and other forms of violence.

In connection with the 2008 session of the Social Forum of the Human Rights Council, OMCT submitted a written statement relating to the eradication of poverty in the context of human rights.

In connection with the preparations for the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Philippines in 2008, OMCT submitted a document containing information on the links between violence and the denial of economic, social and cultural rights in that country. Similarly, information on the links between violence and the denial of economic, social and cultural rights in India was submitted in connection with the Council's review of that country.

UN Special Procedures System

OMCT also made an oral statement to 15th Annual Meeting of Special Rapporteurs, Representatives, Independent Experts and Chairpersons of Working Groups of the Human Rights Council in June 2008, urging the Special Procedures to further develop the examination of economic, social and cultural root causes of violence in their work.

At the invitation of the newly-appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, OMCT submitted recommendation for matters to be discussed by the Human Rights Council during its special session on the global food crisis in 2008. OMCT suggested that the question of social unrest as a result of rising food prices and the potential violent suppression of protest by police and security services be considered by the Council as either a separate or a cross-cutting issue. OMCT referred in particular, to the concerns of the participants in the African Regional Seminar and the reports of excessive use of force by Tunisian police against demonstrators calling attention to high living costs and lack of work.

The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

During the meeting of the African Commission in Swaziland and the NGO Pre-Sessional Forum in May 2008, OMCT reports and CD-ROMs on the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture were distributed, and preliminary contacts were made to facilitate OMCT's involvement in subsequent meetings of the Commission. In November 2008, OMCT was represented at the Forum on the Participation of NGOs in the 44th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in Nigeria and at the 44th Ordinary Session itself, which included in its work the issue of the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence.

Other Advocacy Activities

In 2007, OMCT submitted a document and took part in the UN Expert Seminar on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, made a statement to the OHCHR seminar on the draft guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights and contributed to the NGO online consultation on those guidelines. In December 2008, OMCT chaired the NGO Consultation on those draft guiding principles and presented the results to the OHCHR consultation in January 2009 aimed at preparing recommendations for the Human Rights Council in that regard.

In 2007, OMCT also made a contribution on the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence to the OHCHR consultation on article 2 of the Convention Against Torture and took part in the International Conference in Brussels on development and economic, social and cultural human rights defenders. OMCT made a presentation to the FoodFirst International Action Network (FIAN) consultation on implementing and monitoring the Food and Agricultural Organization's guidelines on the implementation of the rights to food.

OMCT also took part in the 9th NGO Human Rights Forum of the EU Presidency in Lisbon on 6 and 7 December 2007. The topic of the Forum was Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in European Union Policies, with one workshop focusing on Human Rights Defenders and the Promotion of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In connection with the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (26 June 2008), OMCT issued a press release drawing attention to the fact that, around the world, the majority of victims of torture and other forms of violence come from the most disadvantaged social groups and that members of marginalised communities are not only more vulnerable to such abuses but also least able to claim their rights and seek protection and redress. OMCT called upon civil society to remain vigilant to the risk that incidents of torture and violence directed against the poorest and most marginalised elements of society could become more frequent as a result of the growing public unrest provoked by rising global food prices and increasing food insecurity. OMCT also emphasised that, at the same time, it is imperative that governments recognise and respect the right of their citizens to peaceful demonstration.

OMCT made a presentation to the "Expert Seminar on the Impact of Terrorism and Counter-terrorism Measures on the Enjoyment of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" organised by OHCHR in Geneva in November 2008 and raised the issue at the University of Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies' Annual Meeting on Global Issues and its NGO Programme dedicated to Corporate Social Responsibility and the concept of corporate complicity in human rights violations (October 2008).

OMCT took part in the 5th Annual Intensive Workshop on Human Rights and Torture on "Medical and Legal Strategies for Addressing Torture, Ill-treatment, Extra-judicial Killings, Summary and Arbitrary Executions in Zimbabwe", in Harare, Zimbabwe, in September 2008 and made a presentation on the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence. Further, during its preparatory mission to Kenya in April 2008, OMCT staff spoke about the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence on a Kenyan community radio programme. In October 2008, OMCT contributed to an article by CEMIRIDE, a Kenyan NGO, published in The Standard newspaper in October 2008 and entitled "The Reform Path that Kenya should take for a Stable and Better Future".

In October 2009, OMCT, in connection with "World Food Week", organised in Geneva the launch of the first issue of the publication "Right to Food and Nutrition Watch" prepared by FIAN International in cooperation with a number of international NGOs including OMCT. That issue contains the alternative report on Brazil to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights entitled "The Criminalisation of Poverty" prepared by OMCT and its national partners.

OMCT also has been encouraging ratification of the Optional Protocol to the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.