

Working with NGOs to reinforce their capacity for action

Effective non-governmental organisations are crucial to preventing torture and ill-treatment in particular when action needs to be taken to address their economic, social and cultural root causes. OMCT focuses particular attention on strengthening NGO capacity for action, building OMCT's links with them and strengthening links between NGOs themselves.

Strengthening the capacity of NGOs for action is the objective of OMCT's Regional and Special Procedures Seminars, its economic, social and cultural rights library/database and OMCT's information activities. **Strengthening links** with and between NGOs active in the field of human rights is the objective of OMCT's **network support group**.

Regional and Special Procedures Seminars

OMCT organises regional and special procedures seminars on the economic social and cultural root causes of violence.

The principal objective of these seminars is to help NGOs prepare action files for submission to the UN or other organisations, and/or elements for inclusion in alternative reports for submission to UN Treaty Bodies. Emphasis is given to preparing recommendations for practical action to stop or prevent torture and other forms of violence by dealing with their economic social and cultural root causes. An important objective for OMCT is to build partnerships with NGOs to work together on these issues over the long term. The seminars, in particular, seek to:

- help NGOs understand the various ways violations of economic, social and cultural rights are linked to violence and how acting on those root causes can reduce violence;
- help NGOs to develop their own capacity to address the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence;
- identify how action on the root causes of violence could relate to the specific circumstances of the participants' countries;
- assist participants in preparing action files for submission to the UN and other organisations;
- assist participants in preparing elements for including in alternative reports to UN Treaty bodies and in submissions to other institutions (for example the European Union) containing information on the link between the denial of economic, social and cultural rights and torture along with recommendations for specific action; and identify new and emerging issues for attention.

Methods of work

The participants selected to take part in the seminars are asked to prepare and submit in advance of the seminar a 5 to 10 page paper addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture and other forms of violence in their country. That paper was to include the elements for an action file or for elements for inclusion in an alternative report.

The seminars' work was then built principally around a discussion and refinement of draft action files or elements for alternative reports based on the papers prepared in advance in order to ensure that the participants would leave the seminar with practical action to take on returning home. Particular emphasis was placed on the potential for human rights and development NGOs to bring about change by working together.

Providing a substantive and international framework for the seminar's work was also an important objective. For that purpose, resource persons were invited to discuss these issues with participants.

African Regional Seminar on addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence

This seminar, which took place in Maputo, Mozambique from 7 to 11 May 2008, enabled representatives of 17 Human Rights NGOs from 16 African countries to examine the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture and other forms of violence in their countries, select particularly serious instances of violence linked directly to violations of those rights, and design practical ways of addressing those root causes for presentation to national governments and international organisations. The seminar was addressed by the Head of Delegation of the European Union, the Ambassador of Switzerland to Mozambique and the UNDP Resident Representative.

Seminar participants also drafted and adopted the Maputo Declaration Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in which they recognise that violations of economic, social and cultural rights are very often the root causes of the torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment their organisations fight against and that such violations can be effectively reduced and eliminated by action on those root causes. They called on African Governments to take action to make the continent "**free from such practices**". To date, more than 50 NGOs and individuals from all over the world have signed the Declaration. NGOs and individuals in all parts of the world are invited to join the Declaration.

Latin American Regional Seminar

The Latin American Regional Seminar on addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence was organised together with the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales and took place in Buenos Aires from 18 to 22 May 2009. Eighteen participants from Latin American NGOs took part and prepared cases together with recommendations for action addressing the root causes for submission to governments, the UN system, international financial and development institutions and private sector actors.

Asian Regional Seminar

The Asian Regional Seminar on addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture and other forms of violence was held in Manila, the Philippines from 26-30 October. The seminar was organised by OMCT and the Philippines Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), in cooperation with the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP); the country's independent national human rights institution. It was attended by 20 participants from 10 countries from across Asia. Substantive presentations were made by the Head of Delegation of the European Union, the Chairperson of the CHRP and on behalf of the United Nations Resident Coordinator. The aim of the seminar was to explore the ways in which violations of economic, social and cultural rights are linked to violence and how acting on those root causes can in turn reduce levels of violence. Each participant presented a short country report analyzing the links between violations of economic, social and cultural rights and violence in that country which were discussed with a view

to preparing action files or other forms of interventions.

The participants also drafted the Manila Declaration on Addressing the Economic, Social and Cultural Root Causes of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment a companion to the Maputo Declaration adopted by the African Regional Seminar in 2008.

Special Procedures Seminar 2007

The 2007 Special Procedures Seminar took place in Geneva at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies from 18 to 23 June 2007 in parallel with the annual meeting of UN Special Procedures Mandate Holders. The objective was to consider how to address the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence through the UN Special Procedures System. (See: <http://www.omct.org/escr/urgent-interventions/2007/07/d4190/>)

Representatives of national human rights NGOs from 14 countries took part. Participants held in-depth discussions with leading special procedures mandate holders responsible for; torture, indigenous peoples, the right to health, arbitrary detention, the protection of human rights defenders and violations of human rights by private security forces. The participants explored how those mandates and the others in the special procedures system could help them attack the root causes of torture and violence in their countries and what national NGOs needed to do to help make the special procedures effective.

Presentations were made by experts on "A macro-economic perspective on the root causes of torture and other forms of violence" and on the work of the FoodFirst Information Network (FIAN) on "Bringing together human rights and development to address the root causes of torture and violence". Participants met with staff members of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and attended a session of the Mandate Holders meeting.

Special Procedures Seminar 2008

The second OMCT Special Procedures Seminar involved fourteen NGO representatives from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, and took place from 23 to 27 June 2008 in Geneva, also at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. The participants met and discussed with mandate holders responsible for human rights defenders, adequate housing, minority issues, indigenous people, the right to food and the human rights of migrants. In addition, they met with staff of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and attended a session of the Annual Mandate Holders Meeting at which the relations between Mandate Holders and NGOs were discussed. The participants also contributed to the drafting of OMCT's statement to that meeting. (See <http://www.omct.org/escr/events/brazil/2008/06/d20944/>)

During the seminar experts made presentations on "Addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of torture and other forms of violence: Philosophical bases of human rights and the role and limits of human rights NGOs Some questions" and "Violation of Economic Social and Cultural Rights and Torture: Necessity of a dialogue between development and human rights NGOs".

Special Procedures Seminar 2009

OMCT's third Special Procedures Seminar was organised in Geneva from 29 June - 3 July 2009. Participants from 15 national NGOs took part to study the UN Special Procedures system and to meet with mandate holders. They prepared cases relating to the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence for submission to mandate holders, governments and others together with

practical recommendations for action.

Mandate holders dealing with safe water and sanitation, violence against women, violence against children, human rights and extreme poverty and human rights defenders and the former chair of the working group on arbitrary detention met with the participants and discussed how their mandates related to the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence. Participants also met with staff from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and attended a session of the annual meeting of mandate holders.

Expert presentations were made on the "Need to sensitise UN agencies and NGOs to the relationship between economic, social and cultural rights, and violations of civil and political rights, including torture" and "An overview of the socio-economic and cultural root causes that lead to violations of civil and political rights, including torture, violence and impunity". (See <http://www.omct.org/escr/events/brazil/2010/12/d20945/>)

Position papers

Prior to each special procedures seminar, participants submitted short papers examining specific situations in which violations of economic, social and cultural rights led to torture or other serious forms of violence in their country. These served as a basis for developing case studies during the seminar and they also provided the basis for position papers (2007, 2008, 2009) submitted to the Special Procedures Mandate Holders alerting them to serious situations of violations of human rights involving violence.

Building an NGO network

A constant demand of NGOs taking part in OMCT activities is to remain in contact both with each other and with OMCT and to continue sharing information, good examples and ideas. OMCT thus maintains its economic, social and cultural rights network support group of the NGOs with which it has worked. The objective of the group is to help keep them informed of the activities of the project, seek their help in specific activities and assist them to the extent possible in the preparation of cases for submission to the appropriate organs and authorities. Another important objective is to help them in maintaining contact with each other to exchange ideas and seek ways of working together. More than 100 individuals are members of the network support group from some 50 countries.

In addition, there are a number of other NGOs that have asked to be kept informed and all the NGOs of the OMCT SOS-Torture Network are also kept abreast of developments.

In order to extend OMCT's outreach to NGOs more directly involved in promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights and in development issues, OMCT has agreed to collaborate with FIAN (FoodFirst International Action Network) and its national affiliates on actions in a number of areas. In 2008, OMCT also became a partner in FIAN's annual Food and Nutrition Watch publication and was invited to join the ETO Consortium headed by FIAN that focuses attention on the extraterritorial obligations of states. OMCT also works closely with the network ESCR-Asia.)

Results and evaluations

OMCT's practical approach to seminars - taking concrete examples based on national realities - has proven to be a highly effective means of underlining the relevance of addressing the economic, social and cultural root causes of violence among participants and has, moreover, proven to be an

important source of material and case studies. Significantly, this approach has not only encouraged the engagement of seminar participants to look more closely at the root causes of violence in their own countries, but it has also provided the OMCT secretariat with invaluable insights into local realities and processes.

Material prepared by seminar participants has been found very useful in alternative reports to UN treaty bodies and as the basis for action files, press releases and letters to governments. Seminars help participants to address the root causes of violence in their own countries and to create and reinforce contacts and communication among themselves.

Measuring the impact of seminars is important for OMCT. At the end of each seminar participants are asked for their opinion and suggestions in written form (anonymous) and orally in a general discussion. In addition, post-session evaluations to measure the impact of the seminar are carried out after six months. In the end of seminar evaluations, participants report that the seminar had been useful and in the six month reviews the responses have also been positive and encouraging. Many report that the seminar had had a real impact on their work.