



About OMCT Network

Nothing can replace action on the ground, directly in the regions where acts of torture are committed. This understanding has inspired OMCT's network structure, which preserves the autonomy of NGOs that work in countries affected by violence. OMCT's main objective, via its International Secretariat, is to link these organisations and to coordinate and support their operations in order to maximise the effectiveness of their action on the ground.

The SOS-Torture Network is thus at the heart of OMCT's work. It is the most important global network of organisations fighting against torture. At the outset, in 1986, it was composed of 48 NGOs. Today, it counts almost 300 organisations spread around the world.

OMCT actions within the Network follows three principles :

- OMCT seeks to respect the originality and action methods of each NGO member in the Network.
- It believes that the information received from these organisations reflects the reality on the ground in all its complexity, and integrates the local NGO's strategic approach and cultural background.
- OMCT's "modus operandi" completes and reinforces action on the ground, without ever trying to replace it.

Integration into the SOS-Torture Network enables NGOs to benefit from logistical and legal support. Based in Geneva, OMCT's International Secretariat plays the role of the "alert system". It ensures the broad and immediate transmission of cases of torture^[1] that are reported on the ground. Local NGOs are inherently better placed to judge the truthfulness of reported cases of torture and to evaluate the best means to fight it. But the capacity to act is often limited by a lack of means and an only partial knowledge of various international treaties.

Network members are chosen on the basis of the criteria of independence, professionalism and credibility. To belong to the SOS-Torture Network, an organisation must meet the following strict conditions :

- The NGO must be independent. It is inadmissible that it be working for the policy and politics of a State or interest group, whichever it may be. Similarly, OMCT refuses NGOs that support an opposition group seeking to take political power or to overthrow a discredited regime. Each organisation is submitted to a careful examination in order to verify its ability to help all victims, regardless of their political affiliation, their sexual orientation or their religious convictions.

- Each NGO must have as either principal or secondary activity the defence of human rights. It must be able to collect and transmit reliable and verified information.

The Network refuses NGOs that :

- Support an armed struggle or prompt hatred or violence in any way.
- Work for a government, an information service or a political party.

The following NGOs are excluded from the Network :

- Those who have deliberately transmitted false information.
- Those who have manipulated information transmitted by the SOS-Torture Network.

Participation in the SOS-Torture Network offers NGOs a modern and reliable communication tool that is able to quickly disseminate information on cases of torture. OMCT specialists train local leaders. They offer assistance to local NGOs in their legal procedures, notably in procedures that are launched with international institutions. The network approach also enables the sharing and exchanging of experiences between various NGOs. Moreover, Network membership represents a source of protection for NGO members working on the ground.

Working in a network allows NGOs to gain precious know-how :

- OMCT allows various member NGOs to gain specialised knowledge on the workings of UN human rights bodies. According to the principle of "on-hand training", OMCT works with local NGOs on the preparation of Alternative reports that are presented to UN committees, such as the Human Rights Committee and the Committee against Torture. Local organisations participate in the presentation of the report, in Geneva, in front of international bodies. They also develop knowledge that allows them, later on, to present their own reports to UN bodies. Local NGOs also gain an increase in their legitimacy at home in order to demand respect for the various international conventions ratified by the authorities in power.
- The information disseminated by OMCT in the framework of its "urgent appeals" is exclusively received from organisations that are active on the ground. This requirement forces local NGOs to apply a rigorous data-collection methodology. The information that they provide must be precise and verified. Moreover, Network membership implies an increased responsibility for local organisations; it is their job to act directly on the ground.

The development of the Network is one of OMCT's main priorities. To respond to the growing need to fight against torture, it is essential to integrate new credible organisations, especially in emerging societies and in all countries confronted to serious human rights violations. This development is particularly necessary in order to maintain the flux of relevant information from the field.

OMCT favours affiliation with NGOs that are active in under-represented countries, or in regions that are affected by an increasing number of violations. For many years now, OMCT has been conducting programmes on the defence of human rights for specific groups (e.g., women, children, human rights defenders). This strategy allows OMCT to integrate more NGOs that are active in the defence of the rights of specific groups.

Member NGOs pay an annual fee. The sum can be reduced to a symbolic amount or can be converted into an exchange of services if the NGO can justify such a request.

[1] The notion of "torture" also includes summary executions, arbitrary detentions, psychiatric internment for political reasons and other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment as per Article 1 of the United Nations' Convention against Torture.
