



About Urgent campaigns activity

"Urgent Campaigns" are at the heart of OMCT's activities. Created at the very outset of OMCT's founding in 1986, this programme serves as an "alert station" that denounces as quickly as possible all reported cases of torture across the world. As soon as a case of torture is brought to OMCT's attention, an "urgent appeal" is sent to relevant authorities in order to demand the end of violence, ensure the protection of the victims, guarantee reparation and prosecute the authors of violations.

Such "urgent appeals" are circulated every day by OMCT's International Secretariat, which is based in Geneva. Usually, cases of torture are reported by one of the 311 NGOs in the SOS-Torture Network, which is present in 94 countries. Their knowledge of local conditions and their quick reaction time allow OMCT to have access to the most complete source of information, at the international level, on torture.

"In my own name and my family's, I thank OMCT. It is thanks to your organisation that I was able to escape torture and death, and that my children can say that their father lives, and that my wife can say that she has a husband. I wish long life to OMCT, which plays an important role in saving the lives of people who face danger across the world." - **Victim, Democratic Republic of Congo**

In its urgent campaigns, OMCT uses three main instruments:

- **Urgent appeals:** They can be co-signed by individuals, groups or other international organisations. They are addressed to the authorities of the country in which the violations occurred.
- **Press releases:** They ensure the broad dissemination of information on cases of torture, and contribute to putting pressure on State authorities, who are subjected to international opinion.
- **Bilateral interventions:** When a case of torture is reported late, OMCT does not simply choose not to intervene. Rather, it denounces the case by calling directly upon relevant State authorities.

Each OMCT programme also diffuses its own "urgent appeals". These appeals deal with cases of torture relating to specific groups, such as children, women and human rights defenders.

Urgent campaigns allow OMCT to intervene quickly, as soon as a case of torture is reported, in situations in which each minute counts. The fate of a victim - his life or his death - can be decided in a few hours and can depend on the speed of the reaction of human rights defence organisations.

Urgent campaigns also aim to prevent. OMCT intervenes, for example, when a person is transferred to a prison in which cases of torture have been reported in the past. An urgent campaign is launched as soon as serious indicators suggest that a person could be submitted to torture. These interventions also show State authorities that no violation goes unnoticed, and that civil society is

watching them. OMCT actions can also incite States to improve their respect of international human rights norms and to prosecute the authors of torture.

Urgent campaigns enable OMCT to inform various mechanisms in the United Nations system, especially the Special Rapporteur on Torture, of different cases occurring around the world. Through this action, OMCT contributes to protect the victims and to alert competent instances on actions taken by State authorities which do not respect international law in its basic standards. This represents an additional way to pressure these States so that they quickly change both their legislation and behaviour.

OMCT ensures a long-term follow-up on cases of torture in order to guarantee that crimes do not remain unpunished. It demands the creation of impartial investigations and commits itself to ensuring that suspected guilty parties are brought to justice. The ultimate goal of urgent campaigns is thus to offer victims reparation for the crimes committed and complete rehabilitation.

OMCT's urgent appeals have enabled the liberation, the protection and the rehabilitation of a considerable number of victims. Urgent campaigns have led certain States to open investigations and to conduct trials that have eliminated the impunity that authors of these human rights violations benefited from. The positive impact of OMCT's urgent campaigns is also demonstrated by its work with different United Nations mechanisms, such as the UN's Special Rapporteurs, various Working Groups, or the 1503 Procedure. International officials have often reported to OMCT that its urgent appeals constitute a reliable, clear and useful source of information on human rights violations. The information presented in the urgent appeal allows UN experts to launch confidential negotiations with concerned States in order to attempt to resolve each specific case.

Governments also react to OMCT's urgent appeals. Authorities often contact the organisation in order to protest against or to provide information on the reported cases of torture, which can lead to the establishment of a constructive dialogue on the respect of human rights by State agents.