

Tunisia can reset the pace for fighting torture in the region and beyond

Tunis, 04 October 2017, the Executive Council of the OMCT, comprising leading anti-torture experts from the largest global civil society movement against torture, met for the first time in Tunisia to take stock of anti-torture policies and to define the priorities of the organization for the future fight against torture.

During its visit the OMCT executive council met with civil society, the new national preventive mechanism to discuss Tunisia's advances and challenges in the fight against torture and impunity. During the meetings with the President of the Republic and its Prime Minister OMCT executive Council had the opportunity to welcome the many positive steps Tunisia has already taken in the field of Human rights and fight against torture in particular, while indicating that in particular in the field of impunity further efforts were needed to give more substance to principles.

"We have seen over the years significant progress and foundations being built, new laws being adopted, institutions created – above all the first ever institution that can visit places of detention no matter when and no matter how" affirmed the Executive Council. *"These foundations have to be treasured, supported and made to work to show to the people that they are protected from torture"*, said the Executive Council at the closure of its visit.

Despite all the promising advances the OMCT executive council remains concerned that the reform process is far from completed. The executive council is disturbed about the great number of cases submitted to the authorities and judiciary without any final court judgment on torture until today. Even worse, the executive council learned about numerous cases of reprisals, intimidation against those who have the courage to complain and seek help.

"The real test for the reform process will be an end to impunity. Serving justice for torture victims is not optional. We hope that the commitment expressed to us in our meetings with the President and Prime Minister will be translated into clear steps to hold those responsible for torture to account, and to put in place measures that protect victims from any form of reprisals", said the Executive Council.

The Executive Council of the OMCT met in Tunisia also to review the present state of anti-torture reforms globally. It is alarmed that more and more countries adopt restrictive legislation or criminalize anti-torture activist because of the work they do for their societies in assisting victims of torture. The lack of implementation and impunity and a fading commitment to the absolute prohibition of torture in parts of the world including in Europe and North America is an alarming development, as are the situation in countries like Turkey, the Philippines or Egypt in which we are receiving more and more information about torture and impunity.

The Executive Council is equally concerned that the global migration discussion and anti-migration measures ignore that many people on the move had to leave their countries because of repression and torture, that they are vulnerable to torture all across the migration route, and a global counter-terrorism debate that suggests that

torture could be a means to fight security threats. All this is threatening to deconstruct the protections build up over the last fifty years.

“Tunisia has set an example and given hope and admiration to the whole world. We have chosen to come to Tunisia also because successful reforms here will be signpost globally in the fight against torture setting new hope for the whole region”, said the OMCT Executive Council.

As the OMCT Council is meeting in Tunis the organization is launching from Tunisia a new global initiative ‘civil society against torture’ to mobilize civil society organizations around the world against torture.

In the coming three years the organization will reinforce its work in countries around the world to support local actors in their engagement with states for anti-torture reforms and the implementation of the UN Convention Against Torture. It will mobilize the global anti-torture movement united in the SOS torture network collectively to study and document the protection needs for people on the move. And it will work with its global network to communicate clearly that nothing can justify torture even in times of security crisis such as terrorism.

“To the contrary fighting security threats with brutality will make terrorism great again” concludes the Executive Council of the OMCT.

The OMCT would like to thank those who support this new global initiative including the Government of the Netherlands and the European Union, and it wishes to thank those who support its operation in Tunisia, including Switzerland, Germany and the European Union.

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