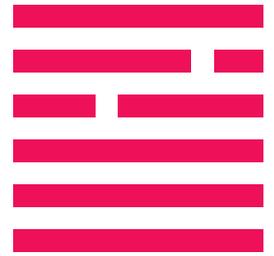


SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION AFTER TORTURE



Effective investigation and documentation of claims of torture can help victims expose the truth about what happened to them and support them in seeking justice and reparation. It helps the victim obtain credible evidence that torture took place, which can have an empowering effect.

WHAT IS DOCUMENTATION?

Documentation of torture is carried out jointly by health and legal professionals who seek to identify connections between the physical and mental state of a person.

Trained health professionals can document and link physical and psychological trauma from torture to specific torture practices with a very high degree of credibility by using the Istanbul Protocol – a UN endorsed manual on documentation of torture.

Victims can use this evidence to file formal complaints, to support civil or criminal cases, as the basis for seeking rehabilitation support and as an authoritative recognition of the damage that they have suffered.

Victims have a right to have their allegations investigated and documented in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol. However, most victims do not have access to such documentation. In many countries, State health services lack the skills and willingness to appropriately document abuses, which leaves victims relying on support from health professionals working with NGOs or having to pay for private doctors.

WHY SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION?

Many torture victims identify truth, justice and reparation as essential components of their process of rebuilding a life after torture. Obtaining some form of formal recognition of the injustices done to them is the final and most difficult barrier to overcome on their way back to life.

Because torture is deliberately kept secret and most States are unwilling to recognise its existence, finding evidence is often very difficult: there are no written records of torture, no audio and video surveillance, perpetrators do not confess and the crime scene is not examined.

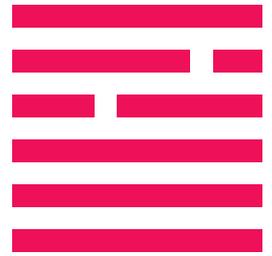
Health based documentation of physical and psychological damage is the most effective way to support torture victims seeking truth, justice and reparation.

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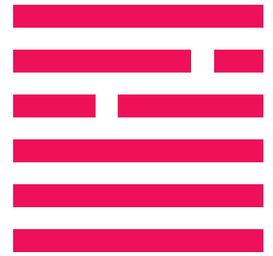
SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION AFTER TORTURE



Therefore, health based documentation of physical and psychological damage is the most effective way to support torture victims seeking truth, justice and reparation. The process of health based documentation is not easy for victims. It involves retelling their experiences and opening up old wounds. If the evidence ends up in court, the victims will have their personal medical records explaining everything that happened to them discussed and possibly challenged by the defense. So victims need all the support they can get in seeking, undergoing and bringing forward evidence of the wrongs done to them.

WHAT I CAN DO TO SUPPORT

SUPPORT DOCUMENTATION AFTER TORTURE



HOW TO SUPPORT?

Documenting torture can help victims rebuild their lives. We can all do something to support these efforts in our communities, countries and globally. Here is what you can do:

Political decisions makers at all levels should ensure that:

- Laws and policies are put in place to guarantee all victims an effective investigation of their torture claims and access to competent and independent health professionals who can document signs of torture in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol;
- All health professionals who come into contact with torture victims are trained to document signs of torture in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol;
- Victims can freely choose to be examined by State or non-state employed health professionals.

Health professionals working with torture victims should ensure that:

- Victims receive a full documentation of their allegations in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol;
- Medical ethical principles are strictly upheld especially those relating to informed consent and confidentiality of medical records;
- Victims receive the necessary support to deal with any re-traumatisation that may occur during the process of documentation;
- They provide services in functional independence from the State.

Judges, prosecutors and lawyers should ensure that:

- All allegations of torture are investigated including through health based documentation in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol;
- The medical evidence of torture can be introduced in all proceedings and that it is taken into account.

We can all:

- Hold political leaders accountable for providing adequate documentation support to torture victims;
- Encourage health professionals to diligently document torture claims and evidence relating to them;
- De-stigmatise torture and abuse, speak up against it and advocate for the rights of victims;
- Support individual victims through the process of having their story documented and taking the evidence forward.

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