

SUPPORT LIFE AFTER TORTURE GLOBAL READING

IRCT Global Reading on the occasion of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2021

Every year, on the 26th of June, we come together as a global community to commemorate survivors of torture. On this day, we pay homage to and honour the voices, stories and experiences of all those who suffered under this heinous crime.

Torture is a terrible stain on the consciousness of humanity. It can leave indelible marks on the survivors' body and mind and its effects on society can be equally scarring. The journey to overcome this harrowing experience and begin healing is rarely easy. It requires tremendous courage, resilience and strength as well as support from family and community to rebuild a life after torture.

Let us take a moment of silence to honour all those who have stood with us in this journey, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Moment of silence]

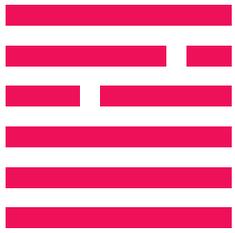
The aim of rehabilitation is to help survivors rebuild their lives after torture. It is a process that recognises the victims' agency and takes into account their individual needs as well as the cultural and social environments in which they live.

During the rehabilitation process, victims recount their personal stories of torture as well as the pain they experience. Many people are hurt by the physical and mental agony that was inflicted upon them as well as by the anguish that comes from the unwillingness of governments to recognise their suffering and provide them with justice and redress.

In every corner of the world, survivors use their stories and experiences to confront perpetrators of torture, to urge governments to recognise their plight and to ensure that their societies are governed with respect for human rights.

As rehabilitation providers, we are in a unique position to help survivors achieve their aims through the health-based knowledge we acquire during the healing process. This knowledge can empower survivors by turning their experiences of torture into evidence that can be used in the fight for justice.

There are many such examples in our work: by using forensic evidence, we can ensure that courts have reliable medical evidence so that victims can claim justice and rehabilitation. Through analysis of clinical data, survivors can aggregate their experiences into statistical evidence that they can use to confront decision-makers to assert their rights. As health practitioners, we can explain the trauma experienced by survivors so that they can better get the support they need.



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However, the pandemic has significant consequences on the ability of torture rehabilitation centres to fulfil their core mandate. Survivors have lost jobs in the worst affected areas of the economy, such as restaurants, hotels, and markets. At the same time, they have worked at hospitals, driving taxis, and in daycare centers which have had to continue in many countries, despite the pandemic, because of their critical functions.

Survivors have lived with uncertainty, increased domestic violence and lack of contact to their trusted therapists. Their trauma was often retriggered by social isolation from friends and family. In some countries, governments used the pandemic and lockdown laws to increase the repression against marginalised communities.

Throughout the past year, these survivors have somewhat been lost in the pandemic 'noise'. Today we reaffirm our commitment to shining a light on those who perpetrate torture, to expose their violations, prevent future occurrences of torture, secure justice for survivors and help them rebuild a life after torture.

Our resolve is strengthened by the knowledge that we do not stand alone. We know that today, on 26 June 2021, all around the world, communities are coming together in solidarity to celebrate each other, commemorate survivors and eradicate torture in their societies.

We dedicate ourselves and this day to achieve that goal.

Thank you.