

Fighting Impunity: IRCT statement for a global reading on the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2014

Today marks the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Every year, on the 26 June, we come together to honour those who have been tortured with a message of support. We come together to show the world that victims of torture are not alone and to renew our vision of a world without torture.

This day also marks 27 years since the UN Convention against Torture came into effect as the prime document in which torture is declared a crime and in which the state is declared responsible.

However, in the last 27 years, as in the last hundreds of years, in all regions of the world torture was committed every day against men, women and children. In most cases no one was prosecuted and punished for those crimes. Those crimes were committed with impunity.

Impunity can be defined as the failure of the state to fully investigate violations; to bring to justice and punish perpetrators; to provide victims with effective remedies; and to take all necessary steps to prevent the violation to happen again.

Impunity also means we have failed the victims of torture. Impunity means that nothing prevents torturers from repeating their crimes. It sends a clear message to torturers that their crimes are tolerable. When torturers are unpunished, there is a risk that torture will grow into a widespread or systematic crime perpetrated by many.

Impunity for the crimes of torture is a major problem around the world today.

From the USA to India, from Mexico to Moldova, from Australia to Egypt, human rights organisations have been flagging widespread impunity for years. Yet the problem remains. Impunity remains an important impediment for the prevention of torture.

But there is hope.

We can see the power of this global movement against torture, with hundreds of organisations around the world joining in their support for victims. The 26 June campaign is now bigger than ever. Our movement — the dedication, skills and motivation of those who seek a world without torture — is stronger than ever.

Together, we can remove the obstacles and end impunity: we can create political will to fully investigate crimes of torture and to bring perpetrators to justice; we can advocate for the inclusion of torture as a crime in national penal codes; for the reduction of the use of immunities and statutes of limitations; to encourage the extradition of alleged perpetrators;

and to advocate for courts to apply international law and the principles of universal jurisdiction.

Together we already achieved the Istanbul Protocol, the leading international instrument for the effective investigation and documentation of torture.

Now more needs to be done.

This year's slogan is: "Those who tortured you to speak, now want you silent." Indeed, silence is a friend of impunity. But today, the global movement against torture is breaking that silence.

Hundreds of events are taking place at this very moment around the world. Peaceful demonstrations, press conferences, concerts, radio shows, panel discussions and many other events are taking place, and thousands of people are, in many languages, finding ways to fight impunity locally.

So today, with thousands of others around the world, we raise our voices against impunity for the crimes of torture. Torture survivors have the right to justice. We have the right to a world without torture.