

## Torture

Torture is one of the most abhorrent violations of human rights and human dignity. Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. Yet torture continues to be inflicted on men, women and children around the world.

International action against torture has been a priority of the Government since the launch of the UK Anti-Torture Initiative in 1998. The Government's position on torture has always been very clear. We unreservedly condemn its use as a matter of fundamental principle. The UK is committed to combating torture globally, and continues to implement an active campaign to help eradicate it. The UK is one of the most active countries in the world on this subject. We continue to work hard with our international partners to eradicate this abhorrent practice. This includes efforts to strengthen UN and other international mechanisms, diplomatic activity such as lobbying, and funding project work.

### Key Activities

#### Diplomatic Activity

The UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) is the key international anti-torture mechanism. Its Committee is empowered to examine State's implementation of the obligations to prevent torture and make recommendations for improvements. The CAT remains the least ratified (141 state parties) of all six core human rights treaties. Since the launch of the Anti-Torture Initiative, the UK has undertaken three rounds of lobbying for the universal ratification of CAT. Since we began lobbying, 34 new countries have ratified CAT.

We used the UK Presidency of the European Union to drive forward an EU programme of action to combat torture in all third countries. During the UK Presidency in 2005, the EU carried out demarches in 39 countries under the EU Guidelines on Torture. Although the main focus of these demarches was to lobby for ratification of CAT, the EU also raised specific issues of concern, including reports of police brutality, extra-judicial killings, and prison conditions. We are confident that EU intervention will help promote the often slow process of ratification in a number of cases. One country the lobbied - Madagascar - has already ratified CAT.

The UK has been a longstanding supporter of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT) since negotiations began over ten years ago. The UK was the third country in the world to ratify the OPCAT. The OPCAT aims to prevent torture and other forms of ill treatment by establishing a system of regular visits to places of detention carried out by independent international and national bodies. One of the UK's main human rights goals has been to secure the entry into force of the OPCAT. In June 2004, the FCO launched a worldwide lobbying campaign to encourage further ratifications in order to bring it into force as soon as possible. This was achieved on 22 June 2006, representing a major landmark in torture prevention. We continue to work with our international partners and NGOs to ensure that it is effective, including through a further lobbying campaign launched in June 2006 to encourage more states to sign and ratify the OPCAT.

An important element of the FCO's work to combat torture is the promotion of a human rights approach to prison management. In 2005 we began a three-year global prison reform programme, aimed at consolidating our previous work on prison reform. Efforts have concentrated on increasing commitment from states to manage prisons in line with human rights standards, promoting this through workshops for prison officials, and engaging with like-minded donors, governments and NGOs to work with FCO on prison reform.

#### Practical Projects

The FCO continues to support concrete project work around the world aimed at combating torture. These include:

- A project run by the Women's Aid Collective (WACOL) aimed at capacity building for judges, prosecutors, law enforcement agents in Nigeria on torture prevention and management. The objective is to combat torture and ill treatment by law enforcement officers and

combat torture and ill treatment by law enforcement officers and create awareness of the effects of torture on victims and work for the prevention of torture and rehabilitation of torture victims. WACOL has in the past year implemented a series of well-attended training workshops for judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers and doctors. A shelter where victims of torture can go to for medical treatment, psychological support and legal aid has also been built.







- For the past three years the FCO has supported the work of the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), the leading NGO advocating the adoption and ratification of the OPCAT. UK funding has helped the APT carry out its OPCAT campaign. The APT has provided advice and assistance to States on OPCAT, on creating effective national bodies in line with the criteria and aims of OPCAT, and on preparations for the setting up of the Sub-Committee. APT involvement has helped many countries to ratify OPCAT, this in turn has been instrumental in bringing OPCAT into force.
- We supported the work of Penal Reform International to help develop public monitoring of prisons in Kazakhstan through a series of seminars and on going discussions with the Ministry of Justice. As a result significant changes have been made to criminal legislation which has established civil monitoring boards to supervise and make recommendations for improvements to prison conditions. We are now funding a further project that builds on the work already done on public monitoring of prisons to work towards similar mechanisms for other places of detention, including police stations and police cells, with the aim of eliminating incidents of torture and ill treatment in Kazakhstan.

### **FCO Expert Advisory Panel on Torture**

The FCO values the views and advice of experts, NGOs and academics. In 2003 we set up the expert panel on torture. The panel comprises leading academics, NGO representatives and human rights lawyers. These experts all have direct experience of international and regional human rights machinery and in related issues such as penal reform and policing. The panel aims to meet twice a year to share views and provide advice on existing and future policy initiatives on torture related issues.

### **Human Rights Publications**

Over the past six years, the FCO in conjunction with human rights experts has produced a series of human rights handbooks aimed at preventing human rights abuse, in particular torture. The handbooks explain how key international human rights standards relate to the day to day work of groups such as judges, prosecutors, prison guards, human rights defenders and medical professionals. The series includes:

-  **Torture Reporting Handbook**
-  **Combating Torture Handbook**
-  **Medical Investigation and Documentation of Torture: A Handbook for Medical Professionals**
-  **Ethical Investigation: A Practical Guide for Police Officers**
-  **A Human Rights Approach to Prison Management**
-  **Guidance Notes on Prison Reform**