

How can children survive torture? Lessons on their redress and rehabilitation
Panel Discussion with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Public event organized by the [United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture](#)
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Room XII, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

Address by Piya Muqit, Executive Director of Justice Centre Hong Kong.

Good morning, I want to thank the Fund for the privilege to address you today and thank you for your interest in hearing about the work we all do for victims of torture.

Tortured children who have fled their home countries to seek safety suffer a constant anxiety about what will happen to them if their story is not believed and they are not given legal recognition by their host State.

As the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Council of Europe reminded my own Government recently, "people are not illegal, their legal status may be irregular but it does not render them beyond humanity".

At Justice Centre Hong Kong we are helping children who have survived torture tell their story and seek formal recognition from the Hong Kong Government that they have been tortured and suffered persecution.

Through meaningful access to justice we are giving a platform for their silenced voices to be heard.

There are currently over 11 000 torture claims in the Unified Screening Mechanism. In the past 2 years only 30 individuals, including a handful of children, have been recognized as tortured and persecuted.

In Hong Kong there are no specialist torture rehabilitation services within the public health system and we can only offer short-term psychological support. Inability to access legal and welfare assistance is a serious barrier to rehabilitation.

In 2015 we were able to assist 200 children but this is a drop in the South China sea that surrounds us.

Children recovering from torture need a multi-disciplinary team working with and for them putting their rights, wellbeing and best interests first and foremost. Only with this approach in my experience working with tortured children for the past 16 years will children recover physically, psychologically and emotionally.

This in my professional view will help prevent these children's children inheriting the pain and suffering.

The legal, medical, health, education and social welfare communities working together gives children the best chance of restoration of both dignity and their voice.

This was the aspiration behind Article 14, the right to rehabilitation in the Convention against Torture and Article 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is what nations aspire to when they ratified these treaties.

The Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture is playing a critical role at this critical time. We know that the Fund has reported an increase of 32% from last year of the children that will be assisted this year by their grantees.

Without the fund's assistance victims of torture in Hong Kong would have no meaningful access to justice and no opportunity to recover from the horror they have escaped from.

The Fund is providing life-saving services to the world's children who have found their way to Asia. But they are also assisting the peers of these children in their home countries who are still there and still suffering.

I am an optimist.

I sincerely believe that the future generations can be spared from our modern day plague called torture but it needs a strategic approach from the global community working with the experts on the ground and experts from the UN and other intergovernmental organizations.

The past 2 days sharing experience and expertise with colleagues from every continent around the world has reaffirmed to me the importance of this continued dialogue and sharing of best practice. To achieve systemic change evidence based research needs to be behind policy and legislative change at the domestic and international level.

In conclusion I want to end with the voice of a survivor currently seeking refuge in Hong Kong,

“We are weak, poor and disadvantaged.
We own nothing
We have nothing
Other than hope”.

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