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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 36/151 and 74/143, complements the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session ([A/79/291](#)), provides information on the activities of the Fund and describes, in particular, the recommendations for grants adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund at its sixtieth session, held in Geneva from 7 to 11 October 2024.

I. Introduction

A. Mandate of the Fund

1. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture receives voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals. In accordance with its mandate and the practice established by its Board of Trustees since 1982, the Fund provides grants to established channels of support, including non-governmental organizations, associations of victims and members of their families, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms, that submit project proposals for the provision of medical, psychological, social, financial, legal, humanitarian and other forms of direct support to torture survivors and members of their families.

B. Administration of the Fund and composition of the Board of Trustees

2. The Secretary-General administers the Fund through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with the advice of the Board of Trustees composed of five members acting in their personal capacity and appointed by the Secretary-General with due regard to equitable geographical distribution and in consultation with their Governments. During the reporting period, the Board comprised Vladimir Jović (Serbia), Julienne Lusenge (Democratic Republic of the Congo), Jens Modvig (Denmark) and Ambika Satkunanathan (Sri Lanka). On 27 April 2024, Juan Ernesto Méndez (Argentina) resigned from his mandate as member of the Board of Trustees. Mr. Jović served as Chair from 13 October 2023 until 11 October 2024, the last day of the sixtieth session of the Board of Trustees, when Mr. Modvig was elected as the new Chair.

II. Management of grants

A. Admissibility criteria

3. Project admissibility criteria are outlined in the guidelines of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture for the use of applicants and grantees.¹ The guidelines require a project application to be presented by an established channel of assistance, such as non-governmental organizations, associations of victims and members of their families, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms. The beneficiaries must be victims of torture and/or their family members. Grants are awarded to projects that provide medical, psychological, social, economic, legal, humanitarian, educational or other forms of services that address the direct consequences of torture for survivors and their family members. As a general rule, annual grants are awarded on a yearly basis for a maximum of 10 consecutive years, subject to a satisfactory evaluation of the project and the availability of funds. The guidelines of the Fund nonetheless clarify that organizations may continue to receive grants if the projects supported provide essential services to victims of torture in areas in which no other organization offers similar services.

4. Subject to the availability of funds, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture also receives projects aimed at strengthening the development and capacity of organizations, professionals or specialized networks in order to ensure the provision of specialized services to torture survivors and their family members. The proposed activities may take the form of training, workshops, seminars or conferences, peer-to-peer training or staff exchanges

¹ United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture: guidelines for the use of applicants and grantees (version amended by the Board of Trustees at its fifty-ninth and sixtieth sessions (March and October 2024). Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/torture/unvftv/guidelines-un-torture-fund-2025-en.pdf>.

5. Outside the annual grants cycle described above and depending on the availability of funds, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture also awards emergency grants for projects submitted on a rolling basis through an intersessional procedure, as outlined in the guidelines of the Fund. Emergency grants may be awarded in exceptional cases according to the following criteria: a surge in the number of victims of torture to be supported owing to a sudden change in circumstances, such as a human rights or humanitarian crisis, which would require an immediate response to address critical needs of survivors at a time when they need it the most, such as in armed conflict settings. Emergency grants may also be awarded to current grantees subject to restrictive or retaliatory measures (such as reprisals for collaborating with the United Nations) as a result of the implementation of their projects, if additional measures are required to ensure the continuation of the delivery of services to torture survivors.

B. Monitoring and evaluation of grants

6. The secretariat of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture conducts thorough screening and evaluation of all grant applications through a desk review, in cooperation with OHCHR field presences. As a rule, a visit to an applicant organization is undertaken before the grant will be awarded for a first-time project application. Regular monitoring visits to ongoing projects for which the renewed support of the Fund is being sought are also conducted to assess the implementation and impact of the projects funded. An internal procedure and guide on conducting visits to projects that have been funded, or are to be funded, have been developed by the secretariat to ensure coherence in the evaluation process.

7. In 2024, a total of 37 on-site visits were conducted to project applicants for the 2025 grants cycle for the purpose of technical evaluation of applications and to organizations receiving annual grants in 2024 for the purpose of monitoring project implementation. Visits were conducted by the secretariat of the Fund, other OHCHR staff and field presences and members of the Board of Trustees. In addition, the secretariat provided technical assistance to project applicants, as required, in particular local, community and survivor-led associations submitting applications to the Fund for the first time.

C. Grants in 2024

Annual grants

8. Of the 190 annual grants recommended for funding in 2024,² two were cancelled. One cancellation was due to the non-compliance of an organization with the requirements of the United Nations Partner Portal, while the other was due to the cessation of activities of an organization operating in a conflict-affected context. Through the annual grant cycle in 2024, a total of 188 annual grants were awarded in 92 countries, amounting to \$8,070,200, to assist more than 49,000 victims of torture. For the third time, all annual grants were processed and disbursed through the Umoja Grantor Management module, which is a requirement for all entities of the United Nations Secretariat. The majority of grants were disbursed during the first trimester of 2024. The Fund continued to operate its customized Grantor Management system, which was developed to its specifications, to receive applications in French and Spanish and to produce analytical reports to assess impact.

Emergency grants

9. In 2024, through its emergency grants procedure, the Fund provided financial support in the amount of \$400,100 for eight emergency grants to civil society organizations to deliver critical services to an estimated 5,540 torture survivors and their family members in the context of humanitarian or human rights crises in seven countries in three world regions (Africa Group, Asia-Pacific Group and Western Europe and others Group). Additional

² [A/HRC/55/32](#), paras. 15–16.

eligible emergency grants applications have been submitted and are currently being evaluated by the secretariat.

III. Financial situation of the Fund

10. In 2024, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture received contributions and pledges from 17 States, in addition to public donations, amounting to \$11,310,530, which represented an increase of \$766,624 in relation to 2023, when the Fund had secured \$10,543,906. The Board of Trustees welcomed the contributions and pledges made and the overall increase in income. Nevertheless, there remained for the 2025 annual grant cycle a gap of \$7,690,430 as compared with the admissible annual grant applications evaluated and recommended for funding by the secretariat and submitted for the competitive review of the Board. As a result, the Fund was unable to support 71 civil society organizations that applied to the Fund to assist their efforts to provide tailored services to more than 54,000 torture survivors and their family members in 2025, and to 14 organizations aiming to build the capacity of service providers.

11. The Board of Trustees, in close coordination with the secretariat of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture and the Donor and External Relations Section of OHCHR, seeks to secure a more satisfactory level of contributions from donors, which is needed to respond to the needs of torture survivors and their family members worldwide. In 2024, the Board intensified its fundraising efforts, with a strategic focus on expanding and diversifying its donor base in order to close the funding gap and reduce reliance on a single donor, thereby enhancing the financial sustainability of the Fund's operations.

12. The Board is grateful for the support received by its donors for 2025 and appeals for greater contributions to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture to support torture survivors and their families, in line with the demand for support. The table below shows the contributions and pledges received by the Fund from 1 January to 29 November 2024.

Contributions and pledges received between 1 January and 29 November 2024 (United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Date of receipt</i>
<i>Contributions</i>		
Andorra	11 256.98	1 October 2024
Austria	332 244.01	31 July 2024
Canada	43 839.08	13 March 2024
Denmark	287 991.43	30 July 2024
Denmark	435 970.22	23 October 2024
France	54 466.23	18 July 2024
Germany	164 113.79	21 October 2024
Ireland	267 952.84	1 July 2024
Kuwait	10 000.00	7 March 2024
Liechtenstein	59 453.03	4 October 2024
Luxembourg	16 233.77	10 April 2024
Mexico	10 000	18 June 2024
Norway	189 917.77	19 June 2024
Peru	1 862.33	14 March 2024
Saudi Arabia	65 000	9 December 2024
Switzerland	330 000.00	18 November 2024
United Arab Emirates	30 000.00	2 July 2024
United States of America	9 000 000.00	8 November 2024

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Date of receipt</i>
Individual donors	229.25	
Total contributions	11 310 530.73	

IV. Sixtieth session of the Board of Trustees

13. The Board of Trustees held its sixtieth session in Geneva from 7 to 11 October 2024 to consider awarding grants for 2025. The Board examined proposals for funding from project applicants and made recommendations on annual grants to be awarded to beneficiary organizations for activities to be implemented during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2025.

14. At the time of the sixtieth session, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture had a net amount of \$9,094,439 available to be awarded for grants in 2025, mainly for direct assistance to victims of torture and their family members. The amount available for distribution to projects was calculated after deducting programme support costs, the operating cash reserve and the expected expenditure for non-grant activities.

15. The call for applications for the 2025 annual grant cycle was open from 15 January to 1 March 2024. A total of 326 applications, amounting to \$18,883,267 in funding requests, were submitted to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. The secretariat of the Fund conducted a screening process based on established admissibility criteria and found that 288 of the submitted applications, amounting to \$17,042,849 in requests, were admissible. It subsequently conducted a thorough evaluation of each admissible project application and found that 263 of the admissible applications, amounting to \$15,804,420 in requests, met the criteria of needs and merits to be eligible for funding. Of those, 244 were direct assistance applications, intended to provide support to victims of torture and their families; the remaining 19 were capacity-building applications, intended to strengthen the capacity of organizations to provide higher quality services to torture survivors.

16. In the light of contributions and pledges received, and in line with the established grant-making procedure, the Board of Trustees conducted a competitive and comparative review of the applications received for direct assistance and capacity-building projects recommended by the secretariat, considering the merit and documented needs of each application, as outlined in the evaluations made by the secretariat. The complementarity of the applications with other initiatives, the number of years of continuous support provided by the Fund for the same project and regional distribution were other factors considered.

17. At its fifty-ninth session, which focused on policy, the Board of Trustees recommended amendments to the Guidelines of the Fund for the use of applicants and grantees, to be applied beginning as of the 2025 annual grant cycle.³

18. Given the income available at the time of the sixtieth session, the Board of Trustees recommended awarding 187 annual grants for 2025, amounting to a total \$8,113,989 to support torture survivors and their families in 92 countries, with an average grant size of \$43,868. Of those projects, 182, amounting to \$7,983,989, were for direct assistance projects for victims of torture and five, amounting to \$130,000, for capacity-building projects aimed at strengthening the delivery of such services.

19. With the 182 annual direct assistance grants awarded by the Fund, it is expected that an estimated 56,381 torture survivors and their families will have access to high-quality recovery services in the course of 2025 with the following geographic distribution:

- 26 per cent in African States
- 26 per cent in Asia-Pacific States
- 14 per cent in Eastern European States

³ [A/79/291](#), paras.7–8.

- 18 per cent in Latin American and Caribbean States
- 16 per cent in Western European and other States

20. The Board of Trustees also recommended setting aside an additional \$980,450 to respond to emergency grant project requests that may be received in 2025 through an intersessional procedure. In the light of current trends, the Board also recommended that any additional unexpected income should be allocated to emergency grants.

21. During the sixtieth session, the Board of Trustees met with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and exchanged information on the grant-making process, the challenges posed by shrinking civic space and the potential for further contributions to peace-building initiatives. During the mission of the High Commissioner to Greece, he visited the Greek Council for Refugees and met with survivors of torture, who highlighted the valuable impact of the Fund's support. With the support of the Fund since 2015, the Greek Council for Refugees has assisted more than 170,000 survivors of torture, including 52 men, 28 women and 32 family members in 2024 alone.

22. The Board of Trustees hosted a briefing for the Group of Friends of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, co-chaired by Chile and Germany, to discuss strategies for raising awareness about the right to redress of victims of torture and enhancing the Fund's visibility. Established in 2019, the Group of Friends, comprising 16 Member States,⁴ promotes the right to redress and the role of the Fund. Chile will continue as co-chair for the second year (2024–2025), while Germany, after serving as co-chair for two years (2023–2024), will be succeeded by Ireland for the 2025–2026 term.

23. The Board of Trustees met with OHCHR staff assisting the Committee on Enforced Disappearances and the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to discuss collaboration and synergies, noting that over 20 per cent of organizations supported by the Fund assist victims of torture in the context of enforced disappearances worldwide. Discussions focused on follow-up to the meeting between members of the Board and the Committee on Enforced Disappearances in 2023,⁵ as well as on the World Congress on Enforced Disappearances, which will take place in Geneva on 15 and 16 January 2025, with the participation of several of the Fund's grantees. During its sixtieth session, the Board agreed to sponsor a panel during the World Congress about the empowerment and multifaceted support to victims.

V. Restricted civic space, including reprisals

24. A global climate of shrinking civic space has continued to affect the ability of grantees to provide direct assistance to victims of torture, including in emergency situations. The Fund's grantees continued to face risks, including physical and online harassment or surveillance, threats, attacks, interrogations, smear campaigns and raids, as well as disbursement challenges, including through the use of restrictive foreign funding legislation.⁶ The response of the Fund included the awarding of emergency grants and, in order to further strengthen its response, the Board of Trustees nominated Ambika Satkunathan as the Fund's focal point for reprisals.

25. In October 2024, the Corporación Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear Restrepo in Colombia won a landmark ruling before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights,⁷ for the systematic persecution, harassment, stigmatization and surveillance of its members. The case was filed by the Center for Justice and International Law as co-petitioner, with an expert report submitted to the Court by the Corporación Centro de Atención Psicosocial, with the financial support of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

⁴ Argentina, Austria, Chile (co-chair), Czechia, Denmark, Georgia, Germany (co-chair), Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Peru, Switzerland and United States of America.

⁵ A/78/263, para. 11.

⁶ A/HRC/55/33, paras. 23–24.

⁷ See https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_544_esp.pdf.

VI. Other United Nations mechanisms

26. The Committee against Torture and the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture continued to reinforce synergies. The Committee against Torture recalled the State obligation to provide redress, including means of rehabilitation for victims of torture, welcoming and encouraging contributions to the Fund in the concluding observations of Thailand⁸ and Türkiye.⁹ The Committee against Torture, the Fund, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment focused their joint statement of 26 June 2024, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture,¹⁰ on accountability for the crime of torture, highlighting the prevalence of impunity over the four decades since the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Fund also organized commemorative activities on 26 June to raise awareness of the right to redress for victims of torture in Tunis and Geneva.¹¹

27. To mark the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, on 14 November 2024 the Committee against Torture and its secretariat, in cooperation with the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, organized a high-level event in Geneva. Speakers at the event, which highlighted the work of the Fund, included the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chair of the Committee against Torture, the Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Fund, a survivor of torture and representatives of civil society organizations. A guide on State reporting under the Convention was launched during the event, which included a live podcast on achieving accountability for crimes of torture. During the live podcast, the Fund facilitated the participation of people with lived experience of torture and civil society actors to emphasize their vital role.

VII. Impact

28. The work of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture is vital, providing life-changing yearly support to thousands of individuals and their families to assist their recovery from torture by facilitating access to holistic services, including in conflict settings. In May 2024, a temporary shelter for victims of torture in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, South Sudan, was opened with the financial support of the Fund through the emergency funding stream. Hope Africa South Sudan, in partnership with the United Nations human rights field presence, is implementing the 12-month emergency project in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal State. The project has already supported over 150 refugees and returnee victims of torture fleeing the war in the Sudan, providing economic empowerment, humanitarian and psychosocial services. The organization was recommended for an annual grant in 2025, allowing it to continue its support for the most vulnerable communities.

VIII. Making a contribution

29. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other public and private entities are encouraged to contribute to the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. It is important to note that only specifically earmarked contributions are attributed to the Fund. Donors may request more information on how to contribute and details about the Fund from

⁸ CAT/C/THA/2.

⁹ CAT/C/TUR/5.

¹⁰ See [Accountability and justice for torture victims central to commemorations for Convention against Torture: United Nations anti-torture mechanisms](#) | OHCHR.

¹¹ [A/79/291](#), paras. 32–37.

the secretariat of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland (e-mail: ohchr-unvfvf@un.org; telephone: +41 22 917 9376).

IX. Conclusions and recommendations

30. The prohibition against torture is absolute and is applicable at all times. The Convention against Torture, adopted 40 years ago, establishes the obligation of States to prevent acts of torture and to criminalize, investigate and prosecute all acts of torture. The protection and participation of victims in the struggle for justice is paramount and should be supported, including through strategic litigation that can set legal precedents to prevent further violations. The Convention also enshrines the right to redress for victims of torture, including compensation and “the means for as full rehabilitation as possible”. Considering the devastating effects that torture has on the lives of victims, their families and communities, States should do their utmost to ensure speedy access to adequate mental health and other essential services for victims of torture to facilitate their recovery process.

31. The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture continues to play a fundamental role to uphold this global commitment by enabling access to medical, psychological, legal, social, humanitarian and other essential aid for victims of torture and their families and by ensuring that their voices are heard and amplified. Since its establishment 42 years ago, the Fund has awarded more than 5,300 grants to 680 organizations, including survivor-led organizations in more than 142 countries, for a total amount of nearly \$220,000,000. In 2024 alone, the Fund awarded grants to 190 civil society organizations, providing direct medical, psychological, social and legal services to over 48,883 survivors of torture, including human rights defenders, political opponents, journalists, student activists, migrants and asylum-seekers, persons with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, children and women in situations of armed conflict, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples in 93 countries across the world.

32. In 2024, the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture received 17 contributions, pledges and public donations, totalling \$11,310,530.73. Through the annual call for applications issued in 2024, the Fund received eligible grant applications for 2025 amounting to over \$18 million in requests for support for victims of torture, a 6 per cent increase compared to the previous year. Additional income for the Fund is required in order for it to respond more adequately to the growing demand for support that it has received from rehabilitation centres and other civil society actors worldwide, although the actual needs of torture victims globally are much greater. The Secretary-General appeals to Member States and other stakeholders to contribute to the Fund as a concrete manifestation of their commitment to uphold the right to redress for victims of torture and to eliminate the practice.
