

**Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on the occasion of the United Nations International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 26 June 2011**

Today, on the UN International Day in Support of the Victims of Torture, the EU resolves to intensify its efforts to secure a world free from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Torture is an abomination of our humanity, our dignity and our values - wherever and however it happens, torture is wrong.

The universal prohibition of torture is firmly established under international law. It must be eliminated, and – in cases where we find that it still happens – we must do all in our power to restore its victims to health, in body and in mind. States must take persistent, determined and effective measures to prevent and combat all acts of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. States must also ensure that perpetrators of such acts be brought before justice. The European Union urges all States, worldwide, to follow its own 27 Members in acceding to the 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. To date, some 50 countries around the world are not yet Parties to the Convention, while almost half of its 150 or so Parties have yet to become full Signatories. It also urges them to accede to the Convention's 'Optional Protocol', which allows for independent visits and verification of torture. All States have an obligation to make sure that victims of torture obtain redress and fair and adequate compensation, and receive appropriate rehabilitation. The EU also strongly encourages States parties to this protocol to take effective measures in order to establish independent national preventive mechanisms for the prevention of torture in places of detention.

The EU also urges countries to recognize the role and authority of the Committee against Torture, in receiving and considering individual communications. Where States have lodged official reservations on the work of the Committee, the EU calls on them to withdraw them.

The European Union has long put its political weight - and its financial resources - behind combating and preventing torture and rehabilitating torture victims. Through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, it is the world's leading source of finance for projects carried out by civil society organisations to rehabilitate the victims of torture, and to combat torture worldwide. Between 2007 and 2010, it spent nearly 50 million Euros on more than 80 projects around the world. For instance, it has supported a major campaign to enhance the understanding and awareness of the torture and ill-treatment of persons with physical and mental disability.

At the UN General Assembly and in the UN Human Rights Council, the EU will continue to support the fight against torture. It fully supports the leadership of the United Nations. The EU Member States have always cosponsored UN resolutions in this context. The EU welcomes the appointment of Juan Mendez as the new UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and it also salutes the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for

Human Rights, the Committee against Torture and the Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture, and the UN Voluntary Fund for the Victims of Torture.

The EU also pays tribute to the persistent and often heroic efforts of so many NGOs and individuals working to prevent torture, and to lessen the suffering of its victims. It knows, with the Mahatma Gandhi, that torture will never achieve its ends: 'You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body, but you will never imprison my mind'. While torture persists, we will fight it: a world free from torture is our shared goal.