REPORT
ON
COMMEMORATING THE UN INTERNATIONAL DAY IN SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE-JUNE 26

Organizational Information

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INTRODUCTION

Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization that aims to help victims, their families and communities to cope with the aftermath of torture and systematic violence, focusing on the most vulnerable sectors of Gazan society, particularly women, children and former prisoners. The Programme seeks to help Palestinian population through addressing the psychological suffering of the Palestinian people, and enabling the Gaza community to sustain the treatment and prevention of mental health disorder that may occur in the future. GCMHP is determined to serving the people of Gaza overcome the psychological effects of violence, confronting the widespread despair and depression in which they live, facilitating, and supporting a healthy Palestinian community.

Since GCMHP’s establishment, treating victims of torture and human rights abuses has been a top priority. Particularly treatment of those individuals who have undergone imprisonment and who have taken home with them the associated physical and psychological consequences. GCMHP has been an active member of the IRCT for the past few years through the participation of Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj and Dr. Abdel Hamid Afana in the Executive Committee of the Council. Moreover, GCMHP has been fighting torture and advocating for its elimination throughout the years. This has been achieved through the clinical and community outreach programs with victims of torture, organized violence, and human rights violations. Such services were tailored at alleviating the psychological and social sufferings of victims of torture and their families and to enable individuals to restore their abilities and functioning in the society in an adaptive manner. Moreover, GCMHP is responsive to community needs through conducting research and studies on the psychological impacts of torture, where a number of studies were published in international journals.

COMMEMORATING THE UN DAY IN SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE

Over the past several years, GCMHP has been commemorating the UN day in support of victims of torture as part of membership in the IRCT. Such participation were through extensive media work, publications, pamphlets, press releases; all of which were aimed at highlighting the negative consequences of torture on the individual and the family.

In 2005, GCMHP organized a workshop on the anniversary of UN day in support of victims of torture, under the title; "support victims of torture". In 2006, GCMHP commemorated the day with jointly with a number of human rights organizations such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the ICRC, highlighting the psychosocial impacts of torture; including a popular March and events at the ICRC office.

UN DAY, 2008

This year, under the slogan, "help us erase torture", Gaza Community Mental Health
Programme commemorated the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture in order to highlight the continued torture impacts that prisoners in Palestinian and Israeli jails are exposed to; to provide information, statistics, about the forms and magnitude of torture impacts; to present to the local and international media information about torture that Palestinians are experiencing; to attempt to influencing the legal, political and social environment for the protection of prisoners; to influence the decision making in terms of prevention of torture in Israeli and Palestinian prisons; to create a culture and awareness among people about torture and prisoners rights; and to shed light on the psychological and social impacts of torture on the individual, the family, and society at large. The events took place in cooperation with local human rights and cultural organizations, namely, A.M. Qattan Foundation, The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and local professional artists in Gaza, headed by Shareef Sarhan and Mohamad Mussallam. The activities of the commemoration involved holding an art exhibition, a seminar, publishing a press release, and publication of a brochure on torture forms and types. The participants involved human rights organizations, academics, officials, and youth organizations as well as representatives of NGOs who are working on the area of human rights and combating torture. Extensive media work and publicity took place to highlight the psychological and social impacts of torture on the individual, family and society at large.

DETAILS ABOUT THE EVENTS

1-SEMINAR: as the theme for the year from IRCT, on June 26, 2008, Gaza Community Mental Health Programme organized a seminar entitled "let us erase torture" on the occasion of the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. The seminar was held at Rashad El-Shawa cultural Center in Gaza. The seminar was attended by representatives of GCMHP, human rights organizations, and the Observer General of the Ministry of Interior in the dismissed government in Gaza. Husam El-Nounou, Public Relations Director of GCMHP, commenced the seminar, welcoming the speakers and the attendance stressing that this day comes in solidarity with victims of torture on the 11th anniversary of the UN day in support of victims of torture. Mr. El-Nounou added that torture is aimed at destroying the physical and psychological state of the human being. Torture is aimed at harming the individual, the family, and the society at large; for this reason, torture was prohibited.
internationally and is considered a crime that the perpetrators should be punished for committing. Mr. El-Nnounou, also added that torture is a destructive power for any society that aspires for democracy and implementation of human rights principles. Mr. El-Nnounou welcomed president Abbas declarations about his intentions to issue a presidential decree for prohibiting torture in Palestine. Mr. El-Nnounou emphasized that the PLC should speed up the process of endorsement of the torture law, introduced by GCMHP. Representing, the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Saber El-Neirab, said; the international law issued a resolution prohibiting the use of torture of all its forms as it destroys all values of society. The law frankly emphasized that torture should be denounced and called for respect of human rights. He added that Exposure to torture violates all human rights principles. Further, representing Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, Mr. Jameel Sarhan, said that the Israeli authority is considered one of the most countries that violated the human rights of Palestinians, particularly in torturing them.

Mr. Sarhan emphasized that torture should be defined clearly to the people in order to be aware of such phenomenon, once they are exposed to any form of torture. Moreover, representing the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights, Mr. Basem Boshnag, said that torture phenomenon was aggravated in the Palestinian society, particularly after 2006, and even more in 2007 due to internal conflicts and dispute as well as the poor professionalism and knowledge of law enforcement officers about human rights issues, particularly regarding detainees. In addition, representing the Ministry of Interior, Mr. Hasan Saify, the Observer General of the Ministry, said that the view of the Ministry to the human is a view that stems from the conviction that humans have dignity and all people should respect each other and deal with each other in a dignified manner. Mr. Saify added that the Office of Observer General worked on controlling the behaviors of security officer and correct their conduct, particularly in terms of detention and the rights of detainees. Mr. Saify also,
emphasized that since the beginning of this year, the Ministry took punitive measures against 800 workers of the Ministry, reaching the level of firing from the job, or even imprisonment. Mr. Saify, said that we seek to give citizens their rights, and in this regard, we call up human rights organizations to work with the ministry and expose the human rights violations, calling the organizations to be neutral in their reporting about violations of human rights and documentation of torture cases. The last paper was for Hasan Zyeadah, psychologist at GCMHP, who presented a paper about the psychosocial impacts of torture in the Palestinian context. Mr. Zyeadah talked about the impacts of torture on the individual, their family, and the society, highlighting some research finding that GCMHP conducted regarding victims of torture. He added that torture is destructive to the personality of the individual that aims to converting them into helpless and powerless as well as feelings of fear and intimidation and paranoia. Mr. Zeyadah, also, talked about the psychology of the torturers, stressing that the torturers high levels of sadism, elegant psychopath, paranoia, and the excessive use of using justification. The torturers are usually have the personality of obedience and compliance to the authority figures. At the end of the seminar, Mr. El-Nounou thanked the speakers for their presentations highlighting the issue of joint work and cooperation between the human rights organizations and the Ministry of Interior in order to combat torture.

**2-ART EXHIBITION:**

Dr. Ahmed Abu Tawahina, Director General of GCMHP opened the art exhibition, named "HAPPENS" was held. Dr. About Tawahina stressed that torture of all forms should be eliminated as it is destructive for the individuals who experience it and people around them. The exhibition involved a display of art work related to prisoners, and torture that is taking
place in the Palestinian and Israeli prisons. It involved expression, through art work, the human face of survival for victims of torture. In the exhibition, eight professional artists presented video art work on the issue of imprisonment and torture. The art exhibition was held in the same place as the seminar to ensure a wider audience. The art exhibition was held in cooperation with the Fine Arts Department of Al-Aqsa University in Gaza, and A.M. Qattan Foundation for Cultural Arts, and the IRCT in Denmark.

3- A BROCHURE about torture was published and distributed at the art exhibition and to interested individuals and organizations.

4-PRESS RELEASE calling to "erase torture" was issued in both Arabic and English and distributed extensively to the media sources. The release included statistics and information about the psychological impacts of torture. The release called for prevention of torture and eradicating it as it causes extreme suffering for the victims, their families, and the society at large.

5-POSTER entitled "Guantanamo" and reflecting the torture was distributed at the art exhibition.