U N I T E D N A T I O N S  N A T I O N S U N I E S

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPTIONAL PROTOCOL**

**TO THE CONVENTION AGAINST TORTURE AND OTHER CRUEL,**

**INHUMAN OR DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT (OPCAT)**

**Geneva, 17 November 2016**

*Delivered by Mr. Michael Møller,*

*Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva*

I am pleased to send greetings to the 10th anniversary celebration of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Today we celebrate a paradigm shift in the human rights arena. The entry into force of OPCAT, on 22 June 2006, provided a new mandate and mechanism for preventing torture. It shifted the focus from mere reporting on measures taken against torture to regular country visits to places of detention where torture and ill-treatment might occur.

Currently, OPCAT has 83 States Parties. This is far from universal ratification, but membership has been steadily increasing over the past decade. The recent ratifications by Cabo Verde, Ghana and the Central African Republic are welcome additions.

Guided by the key principles of confidentiality, impartiality, non-selectivity, universality and objectivity, the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture has been undertaking a growing number of visits to States that are Party to OPCAT. It is notable that, after 51 visits requiring unrestricted access to all places of deprivation of liberty in the countries visited, only twice has the Subcommittee encountered obstacles that have led to the suspension of a visit. Even these difficulties were eventually resolved and the visits were successfully concluded. This is a clear indication of States’ cooperation and that the Subcommittee’s mandate is respected.

The Subcommittee also assists States to establish effective preventive mechanisms and supports their function. Currently, 64 States Parties have designated a national preventive mechanism. These independent mechanisms, which are an obligation of States parties, enable strengthened protection against torture and other ill-treatment. It is important that their functional, financial and institutional independence is guaranteed.

I would like to emphasize the importance placed by the United Nations on the system that OPCAT is creating, and I urge those States that have not joined or ratified OPCAT to do so with haste. By working in partnership with other UN mechanisms and mandates, regional systems, States, civil society and individuals, we can eradicate the evil that torture represents.

United Nations Member States are currently embarked on implementing the 2030 sustainable development agenda for a future of peace, prosperity and dignity for all. Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment has no place in this world.

I wish you a successful celebration.