**47th session of the Board of Trustees of the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture**

**Panel Discussion on Seeking Justice for Torture: Victim Cantered Approach**

**Opening remarks by the Chairperson of the Fund,**

11 April 2018, 11:00 a.m.

Conference Room IX, Palais des Nations, Geneva

Excellencies,

Deputy High Commissioner,

Distinguished panellists,

Distinguished friends and colleagues,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, I would like to welcome you to this high-level panel discussion that opens the fourth annual expert workshop on Seeking Justice for Torture: a Victim-Centred Approach, convened by the Fund. The Fund fosters the exchange of know-how and experience gained over the years by its beneficiary organizations in the field of rehabilitation and redress for victims, which is at the core of mandate of this UN mechanism.

At the outset, I would like to thank the government of Denmark for its support to today’s event. I would also like to thank everyone in attendance: distinguished delegates, colleagues and experts of other UN Human rights mechanisms, in particular the Committee against Torture, as well as representatives from the media.

Almost forty years ago, the international community established this unique victim-focused Trust Fund to respond to the plight of victims. Every year the Fund reaches out to nearly 50,000 victims of torture through its network of civil society partners all over the world that provides essential services to victims such as medical treatment, psychological support, legal aid and representation. As Trustees of this Fund, we witness the tireless work and dedication of our partner organizations (some of which are represented in this distinguished panel), that help victims regain hope, dignity - and in many cases, a sense of humanity. The success of this Fund is not only measured by the number of people who directly benefit from its assistance, but also by the long term impact that rehabilitation has on their family members and communities.

Let us be reminded that torture is, by design, a method of breaking the human spirit and dignity. Access to justice is essential to the rehabilitation of victims, not only because it helps restore their sense of dignity and worth, but also because it reaffirms that torture is a crime and victims are entitled to support and redress.

This year, the Fund wishes to contribute to the marking of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights through this high-level panel. Today’s public event combines the extensive knowledge and lived experiences of an esteemed panel of activists, survivors, experts and practitioners engaged every day in the fight against torture and the struggle for justice. It is my hope and that of my fellow Trustees of the Fund, that at the end of today’s exchange you will walk away with a message of hope and engagement: torture is still a reality across the world, but it is possible to make a difference in the affected lives of people.

Without further ado, let me introduce the exceptional panellists we have here today. Each presentation will last between 5 to 7 minutes:

* Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights;
* Ms. Estela de Carlotto, Founder and President of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo of Argentina;
* H.E. Ambassador Carsten Staur, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations in Geneva;
* Mr. Hassan Bility, Director of the Global Justice and Research Project of Liberia;
* Mr. Jens Modvig, Chairperson of the United Nations Committee against Torture; and
* Mr. Rupert Skillbeck, Director of REDRESS, an international NGO seeking justice for torture survivors worldwide.

After the panellists’ presentations, which will collectively take up to 50 minutes, we will open an interactive segment of questions and answers, which we hope will be enriching and insightful for all. We intend to conclude the event at 12.30 pm.

I now give the floor to Ms. Kate Gilmore, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her opining remarks.

[…………] Thank you.

I now give the floor Ms. Estela de Carlotto, Founder and President of Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo of Argentina.

[………] Thank you.

I now give the floor H.E. Ambassador Carsten Staur, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations in Geneva.

[………] Thank you.

I now give the floor Mr. Hassan Bility, Director of the Global Justice and Research Project of Liberia.

[………] Thank you.

I now give the floor Mr. Jens Modvig, Chairperson of the United Nations Committee against Torture.

[………] Thank you.

I now give the floor Mr. Rupert Skilbeck, Director of REDRESS, an international NGO seeking justice for torture survivors worldwide.

[………] Thank you.

With this last intervention, I would like to open the floor for participants from the floor to ask questions and make comments on the panel.

[…………….]

Thank you.

I would now give the floor back to the panellists to make comments and answer questions raised from the floor.

Conclusions>

We have now reached the conclusion of this inspiring and thought provoking public exchange. I wish to thank all the panellists for their testimonies. I also wish to thank all participants for their attendance.

Before concluding, let me appeal to you that this Fund and the beneficiaries it supports require your continuous contribution. Unfortunately, the needs exceed our current availability of funds. The Board estimates that the Fund requires $ 12 million in voluntary earmarked contributions yearly to fulfil its mandate. We are some 4 $ million away from that target.

In contributing to the Fund, you are taking a stance for victims. Redress, including rehabilitation to victims is not charity. It is an obligation enshrined in international law, with corresponding rights for victims. Let us work together towards the full eradication of torture and the response to the many unattended victims worldwide.

Thank you.

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