**Seeking Justice for Torture: a Victim-Centred Approach**

**A Panel discussion convened by the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture**

**Opening remarks by Ms. Kate Gilmore,**

**UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**

*11 April 2018, 11:00 a.m.*

*Conference Room IX, Palais des Nations, Geneva*

Distinguished Chairperson,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**Introduction**

It is an honour to join you for the purpose of opening this panel that we will help us consider the ways in which survivors of torture – working along ide others in the human rights movement – maintain the fight for justice for crimes committed and for grave harm suffered.

We warmly welcome you all here today and, in particular ,our wonderful and – as you would expect – inspiring panellists.

For its contribution to concrete affirmation of this courageous survival of great cruelty and this robust compassion for those who do so survive and for the families of those subjected to torture, we also here pay tribute to the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (and to all those who support it so generously). The concrete impact that the Fund yields for the dignity of so many, because it also partners and empowers civil society, is something for which everyone involved can feel immense pride.

In particular, I thank the Board of Trustees of the Fund for bringing to Geneva every year survivors of torture and professionals specialized in torture rehabilitation so that there can be exchanged valuable insights rooted in knowledge, expertise and lived experience.

It is said that the truer test of the character of a democratic state is not found in how it treats, elevates or celebrates its most powerful members but rather in how it treats its dissidents and its dissenters, how it treat those who without power would speak truth to power.

70th years ago, out of acrid ashes smelted toxic and cruel in a world war’s torture chambers, there rose a clear and unequivocal promise. Forged not in prosperity but in horror. Drafted not by self-congratulation but by shame - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was the first international text prohibiting torture in absolute terms - it’s fifth article adopted by unanimous support *(“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”);*

That, over the past seven decades, the promise has not been kept for all, diminishes not the promise – it stains only those that failed to keep their word.

As our remarkable panel will show, courage, commitment, compassion an unquenchable thirst for justice sustains the movement against torture – and for the keeping of the promise of its absolution prohibition - the world over.

The courage of their testimonies and the skills of their advocacy - the litigation of cases, the forensic documentation, the psychological support services – all have enabled this promised prohibition of torture to become a greater reality in practice.

Over the past seven decades, pushed on by the human rights movement, the international community has made remarkable progress towards the eradication of torture.

It was the indignation in the face of large-scale cruelty in Chile, and later in Argentina – inhumanity denounced by courageous women such as Ms Carlotto of *Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo*, that prompted the creation too of the UN Fund for Victims of Torture. And here I must emphasize that standing up for victims and survivors itself can be a risky business, with human rights defenders and anti-torture professionals suffering threat of and actual reprisals for their work.

Yet thanks to such courage, today, the absolute prohibition of torture is a cornerstone of international law, and thanks to their determination a comprehensive UN anti-torture architecture has been developed by the international community to strive for its full affirmation and implementation;

The Fund is one of the four pillars of this architecture (along with the Committee against Torture, the Sub-committee for the Prevention of Torture and the Special Rapporteur) that have been consolidated over time;

It is unique in its modus operandi: it provides immediate intervention through its emergency procedure but also sustains long-term partnerships. This means the Fund is in a position to identify and react to trends and crises, and to be alert to horrors hidden from the gaze of mainstream media.

For still today, torture persists. It is perpetrated in diverse contexts– in conflict settings, along informal migration’s perilous routes, in the dank cells of crowded prisons and in the holding pens of local police stations.

If survived, obtaining just response to such cruelty is far from straightforward. Unrelenting struggle and ingenious strategy to surmount countless obstacles – is what it takes as demonstrated by Mr. Bility of Liberia.

Through the Fund and its partners, we are made to better understand the unconscionable extent to which torture is still deployed, but made to see too just how remarkable is the resilience and death defying defiance of those who are not and will never be cowered.

70 years on, victim/centered work – including that enabled by the Fund - shines a light of intense moral character on a road yet to be travelled most fully end – the road whose destination is the absolute eradiation of torture, whose beacon signal surely is “never again” and whose pathway must be paved with truth telling, justice, and healing.