



General Assembly

Distr.: General
27 December 2022

Original: English

Human Rights Council

Fifty-second session

27 February–31 March 2023

Agenda item 2

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which complements the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session ([A/77/231](#)), provides information on the activities of the Fund and describes in particular the recommendations for grants adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund at its fifty-sixth session, held in Geneva from 10 to 14 October 2022.



I. Introduction

A. Submission of the report

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 36/151 and 74/143 and complements the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the activities of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.¹ It contains updated information on the activities of the Fund, in particular the recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees of the Fund at its fifty-sixth session, which was held in Geneva from 10 to 14 October 2022.

B. Mandate of the Fund

2. The Fund may receive voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals. In accordance with its mandate outlined in General Assembly resolution 36/151 and the practices established by its Board of Trustees since 1982, the Fund provides grants to established channels of assistance, in particular non-governmental organizations, associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms, that submit project proposals aimed at the provision of medical, psychological, social, financial, legal, humanitarian or other forms of direct assistance to victims of torture and members of their families.

C. Administration of the Fund and composition of the Board of Trustees

3. The Secretary-General administers the Fund through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) with the advice of the Board of Trustees composed of five members acting in their personal capacity and appointed by the Secretary-General with due regard to equitable geographical distribution and in consultation with their Governments. The Board of Trustees is currently composed of Sara Hossain (Bangladesh), Vladimir Jović (Serbia), Juan Ernesto Méndez (Argentina), Lawrence Murugu Mute (Chair, Kenya) and Vivienne Nathanson (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

II. Management of grants

A. Admissibility criteria

4. Project admissibility criteria are outlined in the guidelines of the Fund.² The guidelines require a project proposal to be presented by an established channel of assistance, such as non-governmental organizations, including associations of victims and of family members of victims, private and public hospitals, legal clinics and public interest law firms. The beneficiaries must be victims of torture and/or their family members. Grants are awarded to projects providing direct assistance to victims of torture, which may consist of medical or psychological assistance, help with social or financial reintegration, as well as various forms of legal assistance for victims or members of their families, including support in seeking redress or applying for asylum. As a general rule, annual grants are awarded on a yearly basis for a maximum of 10 consecutive years, subject to a satisfactory evaluation of the project and the availability of funds.

5. Subject to the availability of funds, the Fund also receives projects seeking to organize training or capacity-building activities for health-care professionals or other service

¹ [A/77/231](#).

² “United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture: guidelines for the use of applicants and grantees”, adopted by the Board of Trustees during its fifty-first session, on 7 July 2020, and amended intersessionally on 1 October 2020. Available at www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Guidelines-UN-Torture-Fund2021_EN.pdf.

providers. These projects may take the form of training, workshops, seminars and conferences, peer-to-peer training and staff exchanges that would result in an increased capacity to deliver professional care to victims. They are to be conducted primarily for the benefit of the professional staff of the applicant organization. Grant requests for projects involving research, studies, publications or other similar activities are not admissible.

6. Outside of the regular grants cycle and subject to the availability of funds, the Fund also provides emergency assistance to projects submitted through its emergency intersessional procedure, as outlined in its guidelines. Emergency grants may be awarded in exceptional circumstances, such as a sudden increase in the number of victims of torture to be assisted owing to a humanitarian crisis, including armed conflict, war or natural disaster. Emergency grants may also be awarded when such a crisis results in a grave situation that makes it impossible for an organization to continue assisting beneficiaries (e.g. destruction of premises or offices), for the purpose of enabling the organization to resume its activities.

B. Monitoring and evaluation of grants

7. The secretariat of the Fund conducts a thorough evaluation of all grant applications through a desk review. Generally, as part of the evaluation of project applications, visits to organizations are also carried out before a grant is awarded to a new project proposal. Regular monitoring visits to ongoing projects for which the renewed support of the Fund is being sought are also conducted to assess the implementation and impact of the funded projects. An internal guide on conducting visits to projects that have been funded, or are to be funded, was developed by the secretariat of the Fund to ensure coherence in the evaluation process.

8. As most travel restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic have been lifted worldwide, the conduct of onsite visits has been resumed. In 2022, to clear the backlog caused by the pandemic, the secretariat organized 101 visits to project applicants for technical evaluation, which were conducted by the secretariat, other OHCHR staff and field presences, and members of the Board of Trustees.

III. Financial situation of the Fund

9. In 2022, the Fund received contributions and pledges from 20 Member States, in addition to public donations, amounting to \$9,575,089.36. While this represents a decrease of nearly \$1,000,000 in relation to 2021, when the Fund had secured \$10,526,415, the amount available for grants remained relatively stable, in light of carry-over generated during the pandemic and the cancellation of some grants. During the previous five years, the Fund had received an average annual sum of between \$8 million and \$9 million. The Board of Trustees welcomed all the contributions and pledges made. Nevertheless, this year there remains a shortfall of approximately \$5,000,000 as compared with the eligible applications submitted for direct assistance grants. As a result, the Fund was unable to support projects or provide larger grants that would have assisted approximately 21,000 more victims of torture and their family members in 2023.

10. The Board of Trustees, in close coordination with the secretariat of the Fund and the Donor and External Relations Section of OHCHR, seeks to secure a more satisfactory level of contributions from donors, which is needed to respond to the current realities of victims of torture and their family members worldwide. It is estimated that, on average, an annual income of at least \$13 million is necessary to respond adequately to the requests for funding received by the Fund from rehabilitation centres and other civil society actors each year, while noting that the amount represents only a fraction of the estimated need for assistance for torture survivors worldwide. The table below shows the contributions and pledges received by the Fund up to 5 December 2022.

Contributions and pledges received between 1 January and 5 December 2022
(United States dollars)

<i>Donor</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Date of receipt</i>
<i>Contributions</i>		
Austria	20 283.98	11 August 2022
Canada (including a contribution of \$30,340.63 from Quebec)	47 694.01	19 April 2022
	30 340.63	1 August 2022
Czechia	8 102.50	29 September 2022
Denmark	703 565.09	24 June 2022
France	96 899.22	19 October 2022
Germany	96 899.22	21 October 2022
India	50 000.00	11 August 2022
Ireland	140 918.58	16 June 2022
Italy	10 141.99	12 August 2022
Kuwait	10 000.00	27 April 2022
Liechtenstein	80 472.10	22 March 2022
Luxembourg	16 741.07	8 February 2022
Peru	1 865.53	10 January 2022
Qatar	29 997.00	24 August 2022
United Arab Emirates	20 000.00	1 August 2022
United States of America	8 000 000.00	19 October 2022
Public donations	251.06	
Total contributions	9 364 171.98	
<i>Pledges</i>		
Andorra	10 288.07	
Chile	4 980.00	
Mexico	10 000.00	
Norway	185 649.31	
Total pledges	210 917.38	
Total contributions and pledges	9 575 089.36	

IV. Fifty-sixth session of the Board of Trustees

11. The Board of Trustees held its fifty-sixth session in Geneva from 10 to 14 October 2022. The Board of Trustees examined proposals for funding and made recommendations on grants to be awarded to beneficiary organizations for activities to be implemented in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2023.

12. At the fifty-sixth session, the Fund had a net amount of \$10,665,049.19 available to be awarded to activities in 2023, mainly for grants to support critical services to victims of torture and their family members. The amount available for distribution to projects (90 per cent) was calculated after deducting programme support costs, the operating cash reserve and expected expenditure for non-grant activities (10 per cent).

13. During the session, the Board of Trustees reviewed a total of 261 admissible project proposals received and evaluated by the secretariat for 2023: 237 applications were aimed at providing direct assistance to victims of torture and their families; and 24 applications were intended to provide capacity-building in the field of rehabilitation. The total amount

requested for funding was \$15,808,680.50, including \$13,931,924.89 for direct assistance projects.

14. In line with the established grant-making procedure, the Fund reviewed project proposals on a competitive basis, taking into account the merit and documented needs related to each application, as outlined in the evaluations of the secretariat. The applications' complementarity with other initiatives, the number of years of continuous support by the Fund for the same project and available income were also considered.

15. The Board of Trustees recommended a total of 190 annual grants for projects to be implemented in 2023, in 90 countries, for a total amount of \$9,146,000. Of those projects, 184 are for the delivery of direct assistance services to victims of torture (\$8,931,000) and 6 are training and capacity-building projects (\$215,000) aimed at strengthening the capacity of the beneficiary organizations to deliver such services. With the vital financial assistance of the Fund, it is expected that more than 53,389 victims and their families worldwide will have access to rehabilitation and other forms of concrete assistance in the course of 2023. Compared with last year, this represents a slight increase in the number of grants and the amount awarded (182 grants for \$8,771,000 in 2022).

16. To ensure a satisfactory level of accountability for each grant, the Board of Trustees maintained an average grant size of approximately \$48,130 for annual grants for 2023, compared with \$48,271 the previous year, with the following geographic distribution:

- (a) 27 per cent in Asia-Pacific States;
- (b) 22 per cent in Western European and other States (noting that the majority of project beneficiaries are persons on the move from other regions);
- (c) 21 per cent in African States;
- (d) 15 per cent in Latin American and Caribbean States;
- (e) 15 per cent in Eastern European States.

17. Based on current trends and available income, the Board of Trustees also recommended setting aside an additional \$605,046 to respond to emergency assistance requests that may be received in the course of 2023 through the intersessional emergency grants procedure of the Fund.

18. Through its emergency procedure, in 2022, the Fund was able to provide financial support totalling \$368,976 for five projects in four regions of the world, for the immediate relief of more than 2,000 victims of torture. Additional applications have been received and are currently being evaluated. Grants under the emergency procedure were awarded to support vital rehabilitation services in contexts meeting the following criteria: sudden change of circumstances; surge of needs for victims of torture; and the need for an immediate response.

19. The Board of Trustees continued to consider the impact of the global pandemic on the incidence and risk of torture worldwide, the greater vulnerability of some victims of torture (such as persons deprived of liberty) to the virus and the limitations to access medical treatment, humanitarian aid and other essential services. The capacity of organizations to continue to deliver assistance remotely or through other means as required was also taken into consideration when monitoring grant implementation and in decisions about future grants. The Fund continued to allow for justified budget adjustments³ and no-cost extensions⁴ to enable organizations to continue reaching survivors, while ensuring accountability of the use of funds, by adapting to evolving circumstances.

20. In 2022, all grants were processed and disbursed for the first time through the Umoja grantor management module, a requirement for all Secretariat entities. The Fund's grantees also registered in the United Nations Partner Portal, the new mandatory platform allowing for a due diligence assessment common throughout the Secretariat. The new Umoja grantor

³ "United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture: guidelines for the use of applicants and grantees", para. 101.

⁴ Ibid., para. 53.

management module has yet to develop an external interface accessible to organizations, language versions in addition to English or repository or tracking functions. The Fund therefore continued to operate its customized Grantor Management System, which was created according to its specifications, inter alia, in order to continue to receive applications in French and Spanish and to produce analytical reports to assess impacts. On the recommendation of the Board of Trustees, additional staff resources were allocated to address the practical implications of the migration to the Umoja grantor management module and to pre-empt possible payment delays.

V. Restricted civic space, including reprisals

21. A global climate of shrinking civic space has continued to affect the abilities of grantees to provide direct assistance to victims of torture, including in emergency situations. In that context, grantees increasingly face risks, including reprisals, encountered by virtue of their work with United Nations human rights mechanisms, including the Fund.

22. In 2022, six grantees reported undue closures, resulting in the cancellation of one of the grants, and an additional grant was cancelled due to security concerns for the grantee. In the report on cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights submitted to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-first session,⁵ the Secretary General reported on incidents against seven grantees and project beneficiaries. Grantees have informed the Board of Trustees and the secretariat of the Fund about difficulties in applying for grants and implementing projects due to dissolution, administrative restrictions, raids on office premises, human rights violations against staff members or obstacles to their work. In March 2022, the Board of Trustees adopted new procedures to respond to incidents against grantees.

VI. Fortieth anniversary of the Fund

23. Activities to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Fund continued in 2022, as decided by the Board of Trustees.⁶ To conclude the commemorations, the Fund organized an event in Chile on 24 June 2022, highlighting the Fund's historic links to that country, and published 40 profiles of survivors and practitioners to illustrate the impact of its work across four decades. The stories, entitled "The road to redress", feature individuals who have survived the unthinkable and managed to rebuild their lives and give back.

24. In the context of the commemorations, the Fund decided to take stock of its impact. The Board of Trustees recommended an impact assessment in 2023, aiming to evaluate the Fund's work through evidence gathering and analysis. The assessment will focus on the Fund's relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, leading to recommendations for improvements, including the development and optimization of monitoring, evaluation, learning and accountability systems and tools. The exercise will take place in parallel with that of the United Nations voluntary trust fund on contemporary forms of slavery, with which the Fund shares a joint secretariat in OHCHR, and which is currently celebrating its thirtieth anniversary.

25. The anniversary also provided an opportunity to build a strategic partnership with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The Chair of the Fund's Board of Trustees, Mr. Murugu Mute, took part in the Commission's seventy-third ordinary session held in Banjul. The Chair of the Board of Trustees delivered a statement during the session, raising awareness about the Fund and the needs of victims of torture. The Chair also participated in the Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum, which preceded the Commission's session. More than 50 non-governmental organizations took part in a side event entitled "Aiding survivors of torture and contemporary forms of slavery in Africa", organized by the Fund. Speakers included the Chair of the Board of Trustees and representatives of grantees. The Fund's participation provided an unprecedented opportunity

⁵ [A/HRC/51/47](#).

⁶ [A/HRC/49/63](#), paras. 23–26.

for outreach to civil society organizations from across the African continent. This increased visibility will likely lead to a larger pool of applicants next year. These activities also set the stage for stronger collaboration with the Commission in the future.

VII. Making a contribution

26. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other public and private entities are encouraged to contribute to the Fund. It is important to note that only specifically earmarked contributions are attributed to the Fund. For more information on how to contribute and details about the Fund, donors are requested to contact:

Secretariat of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
United Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Email: ohchr-unvft@un.org; telephone: +41 22 917 9376.

VIII. Conclusions and recommendations

27. In 2022, the Fund awarded grants to approximately 182 civil society organizations providing direct medical, psychological, social and legal services to more than 46,500 torture survivors in 91 countries across the world. The Fund continues to play an indispensable supporting role for organizations providing crucial specialized assistance to victims of torture and their families, through the impartial delivery of direct assistance.

28. Despite its absolute prohibition, the practice of torture persists worldwide. A broad range of victims are affected, notably migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers, persons on the move, human rights defenders, political opponents, journalists, young persons, persons with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, children and women in armed conflicts, persons belonging to minorities, victims of enforced disappearances and indigenous peoples. In such contexts, the Fund's operational approach complements the work of other United Nations mechanisms that combat torture. Civil society actors supported by the Fund are often on the front line responding to the needs of victims of torture, despite daunting challenges, including civic space restrictions.

29. As stressed by United Nations anti-torture mechanisms, reprisals and restrictive and retaliatory measures against civil society organizations and victims of torture seeking redress through the United Nations human rights mechanisms are on the rise in all regions of the world, with detrimental effects on the smooth running of the Fund and its operations and, in particular, on the effective delivery of assistance to torture survivors by the Fund's grantees on the ground. The Board of Trustees of the Fund have urged States to ensure a safe and enabling environment for civil society organizations, with a view to safeguarding their work in providing redress to victims of torture. In that regard, it is important to promote positive narratives about civil society and its contribution to society, notably as regards the delivery of critical rehabilitation services to torture survivors.

30. The Fund needs to enlarge its donor base and receive a minimum of \$13 million a year to respond more adequately to the high demand for assistance received by it from rehabilitation centres and other civil society actors worldwide, although the actual needs of victims of torture worldwide are much higher. In 2022, the Fund received 20 contributions and pledges, as well as public donations, totalling \$9,575,089.36. Every year, the Fund must turn down dozens of applications because of a lack of sufficient resources. Due to the decrease in donations compared with last year, combined with the yearly shortfall compared with eligible project applications, the Fund was unable to support projects that would have assisted thousands more torture survivors and their families. The Secretary-General appeals to Member States and other stakeholders to contribute generously to the Fund, noting that contributions are a concrete manifestation of the commitment of States to the elimination of torture, in line with the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as other human rights instruments. The Fund continues to play an indispensable role by supporting organizations that provide specialized assistance to victims of torture and their families throughout the world.
