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REDRESS pays tribute to survivors on the UN Day in Support of Victims of Torture

London, 25 June 2014 – Tomorrow the international community will honour victims of torture on the UN Day in Support of Victims of Torture.

On this day REDRESS pays tribute to the increasing number of survivors who are rising up to demand justice and, in so doing, helping to turn the tide from a culture of impunity to one of accountability, despite the many obstacles that still persist on the way.

In recent years, we have seen survivors hold governments accountable for failing to protect them; advancing cases and setting precedents for other survivors; affirming their own rights as well as the rights of other survivors; helping bring about fundamental changes in the law and changing perceptions of torture.

In 2012, three elderly Kenyan torture survivors won a historic legal victory which forced the British government to acknowledge for the first time the torture inflicted by the colonial administration upon thousands of prisoners in the 1950s. Their victory broke the silence and denial that had surrounded the suffering of so many victims for decades.

Also in 2012, in another case brought by Lahoucine El Haski, a Moroccan national, against Belgium, the highest human rights court in Europe upheld the prohibition on the use of evidence obtained through torture. Mr El Haski was convicted of terrorism in Belgium, based on evidence obtained in Morocco allegedly under torture or ill-treatment.

In the DRC, hundreds of survivors have risen up to demand justice for the atrocities committed against them during the armed conflict. In a development which would have been unthinkable just a few years ago, three Congolese warlords have had to answer charges before the International Criminal Court and two have been convicted since.

These examples are just a few of many. Only last year, REDRESS worked on 123 cases relating to 810 survivors in 23 countries. Some of our clients' recent successes are:

- [Mr Dev Bahadur Maharjan](#), a Nepali teacher. He was arrested by the army and held in secret detention for nearly a year, where he was kept blindfolded or hooded at all times, and subjected to severe beatings. He brought a case against Nepal before the UN main human rights body. In a landmark first, as part of the remedy awarded by the UN Human Rights Committee, Nepal was told to enact a law criminalising torture and to repeal laws granting immunity to alleged perpetrators of torture and enforced disappearances.

- [Tanya](#) (her name has been changed), a British humanitarian aid worker. She was raped at an Egyptian checkpoint by a military officer. After she complained to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Foreign Office was forced to change their guidance on handling sexual violence complaints worldwide and improve training for their consular staff.

- [Mr Leopoldo García Lucero](#), a Chilean survivor from the Pinochet-era, won an important ruling before the Americas' highest court which upheld the right to justice and to reparation for exiled torture survivors.

- [Mr Gabriel Shumba](#), a Zimbabwean human rights defender. He was arrested, beaten, hooded, electrocuted, burned with a chemical substance and forced to sign a confession for a crime he didn't commit. He had to flee Zimbabwe. His case highlighted the brutal repression of regime opponents. He won a case against Zimbabwe before Africa's human rights commission and Zimbabwe was requested to pay him compensation and to bring those responsible to account.

- [Mr Necati Zontul](#), a Turkish immigrant who was raped by Greek coastguards, won a case before Europe's highest human rights court which highlighted the poor conditions of detention and ill-treatment suffered by many migrants in Greece. The court found that his rape amounted to torture and ordered Greece to pay him €50,000 in compensation. The court also heavily criticised the actions of the Greek authorities.

This is what these survivors have said about their pursuit of justice:

"This important ruling adds to Africa's struggle against impunity, and the case is representative of thousands who have suffered torture and various indignities at the hands of a repressive regime in Zimbabwe," said Mr Shumba.

"It was important to fight the Foreign Office on this, because not only did many of their staff not do their job to assist me, but I felt their behaviour reflected a wider pattern of blaming the victim that sexual violence victims often experience," said Tanya.

"I am glad that the judgment recognized that Chile could have done more for victims like us. I also hope the judgment will help prevent similar events from happening in the future," said Mr Garcia Lucero.

"I am so happy that they recognised that this was rape and torture. And even though my attackers are not in jail, still they have been labelled as guilty," said Mr Zontul.

Carla Ferstman, Director of REDRESS, said: "We are seeing more survivors rising up from terrible and dehumanising experiences to speak out against injustice, to challenge governments that have failed to protect them and to demand their day in court. With their courage, we are beginning to win the fight against impunity."

Coinciding with 26 June, REDRESS has also launched a multi-lingual advertising campaign in community publications in the UK to raise awareness among survivors of their options to seek justice.

For further information please contact Eva Sanchis, REDRESS' Communications officer on eva@redress.org or +44 (0) 20 7793 1777.

About REDRESS: REDRESS has been helping torture survivors obtain justice and reparation since 1992. It works in partnership with like-minded organisations around the world to end impunity and eradicate the practice of torture worldwide. REDRESS has intervened in a range of leading torture cases in the UK and abroad. More information about our work is available on www.redress.org.