

## **GQUAL, IRCT, REDRESS, OMCT, ISHR, APT and Amnesty International Concerned by the Continued Lack of Nominations of Women Candidates to the Committee against Torture**

The GQUAL Campaign, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), REDRESS, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) and Amnesty International renew their call on States parties to the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT) to nominate and elect qualified and independent candidates to the Committee against Torture (CAT) with a view to achieving gender parity in the composition of the Committee.

States should act as a matter of urgency, in the lead-up to the upcoming 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of States parties to the Convention on 19 October 2023 in Geneva, during which five members to the CAT will be elected.<sup>1</sup>

In our previous joint letter of 23 May 2023, we expressed serious concern about the lack of women nominees for election to the CAT, ahead of the initial nomination deadline of 16 June 2023 (while State parties to the Convention were encouraged to nominate candidates by this date, they can technically choose to nominate candidates at any point before the election date of 19 October).

In particular, we emphasized the very real risk that the Committee would be left with only one female member, which would significantly undermine gender representation within the CAT as well as its legitimacy and effectiveness, unless States parties took strong action to remedy this situation by nominating a sufficient number of qualified and independent women candidates.<sup>2</sup>

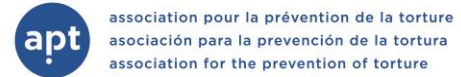
Regrettably, since the time of our previous statement, the gender balance in nominations has only marginally shifted, with women currently comprising just three out of 13 nominees. The current pool of candidates is still highly gender-unbalanced, perpetuating the risk that the Committee will be left with only one, or at best four women out of 10 members. The current state of affairs is particularly regrettable in light of UN High Commissioner Volker Türk's recent letter to Member States, which calls attention to the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a key opportunity to deliver on the promise of women's equal and meaningful participation in public and political life as an essential condition for progress and for the realisation of all human rights. In this letter, the High Commissioner specifically urges States to take action to achieving gender parity in the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies.

To the statement of the High Commissioner, we would add that if States are unable to ensure gender parity in the composition of the Treaty Bodies, further reforms might be needed in the Treaty Bodies system to ensure the right to equality and non-discrimination is upheld in these

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<sup>1</sup> The Committee is currently comprised of seven male and three female members, with the terms of three male and two female members set to expire at the end of this year.

<sup>2</sup> As of our open letter of 23 May 2023, only six male candidates had been nominated for election to the CAT.



organs.

As stated by the [Human Rights Council Advisory Committee](#), the underrepresentation of women in international bodies has a significant impact on the human rights to equality and non-discrimination, and the right of women to equal participation in international decision-making. Gender parity is particularly important to the quality and legitimacy of human rights bodies' policies and decisions, which stem from the principle of equality. In the absence of gender parity, UN bodies risk overlooking matters and perspectives that should be part of their political and legal agenda. As such, a balanced representation of women is required for their lives and experiences to be accounted for in all aspects of the work of the UN.

Women have been historically underrepresented in the CAT. As the upcoming election will determine half of the CAT's membership, it stands to have a crucial impact on the legitimacy and effectiveness of the main human rights body addressing torture and other ill-treatment globally. Former CAT members [Nora Sveaass and Felice Gaer have noted](#) that at several times in the Committee's history, members questioned whether gender-based violence should continue to be addressed by the CAT at all. While this view appears to have shifted in recent years, it is crucial that women's experiences with torture and other ill-treatment continue to be integrated in the CAT's work, and that its composition is representative enough to ensure that women's experiences of torture are adequately considered and addressed.

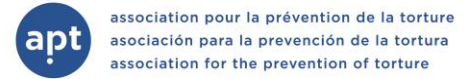
The Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls and the Commission on the Status of Women use parity as a measure of equality, meaning no less than 50 percent of a given body consisting of one gender.

**We therefore strongly call on States parties to take pro-active steps and to ensure that the list of nominees includes a minimum of five qualified and independent women candidates, to ensure that during the election the Committee might still achieve gender parity. We further reiterate the recommendations issued by the Advisory Committee, and call on States parties to:**

- **Proactively seek qualified and independent female candidates for nomination to the CAT, including after the initial nomination deadline.**
- **Consider extending the initial nomination deadline of 16 June with a view to encouraging additional nominations of qualified and independent female candidates.**
- **Consider the actual and historical representation of women in the CAT and commit to nominating qualified and independent candidates of this underrepresented group.**

**And to:**

- **Consider the importance to achieve gender parity when voting for the composition of the CAT.**
- **Agree to target measures, and vote for members of the gender that is currently underrepresented.**



- **Vote for qualified and independent women candidates in consecutive voting rounds if the minimum targets for parity are not achieved in the first round of votes.**