

**2014 North-South Prize Ceremony**  
**Mrs Suzanne Jabbour**  
**Winner of the North-South Prize**

*Mr President of the Portuguese Republic,  
Mrs President of the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic,  
Honourable Members of the Assembly of the Republic,  
Mr Secretary General of the Council of Europe,  
Mr Chair of the North-South Center  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is an honor and a privilege to be among the list of those outstanding individuals and distinguished Prize Winners. This award is an encouraging message not only for me, but also for those who believe that the promotion and protection of human rights is not a slogan but a way of life.

I would like to express my gratitude to the **Council of Europe** for sponsoring the North-South Prize and my appreciation for the continued and resolute support of the **European Union** towards establishing a cooperation platform with developing countries. I would like more particularly to thank the **North-South Centre** and all people involved in its functioning. As a human rights activist and as a networking agent between North and South of the world, it is an honor for me to receive the blessing of this prize.

Allow me to thank the efforts of the European Union for the prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in all parts of the world, and namely the EU Delegation in Lebanon for believing in what my team and myself do every day, for believing that our work makes a difference to those who suffer and are too often ignored.

Highlighting that this is a joint award and that I am here today as interlocutor of the Lebanese civil society at large, and of my colleagues in Restart Center who work hard on daily basis to offer their contribution for the protection of human rights and bringing hope to victims. In 1996, Restart Center was named after the intention of helping those who have suffered severe and inhuman acts of violence, to *re-build* their lives. And it is with those people, with all the *victims of torture*, with all the victims of abuses and ill-treatments that I want to share this honorable prize.

At this very moment, while standing before you, somebody is being tortured, somebody is silent about it, somebody is allowing torture to happen, and somebody is not accountable for having committed the abhorrent, inhuman, and useless crime of torture. When victims are being tortured, they are not tortured alone; their families are tortured, torn and often irreversibly broken. When torture happens a whole society is tortured, a country is tortured, humanity is tortured...

Torture takes place behind closed doors, in darkness and it happens in more than 140 countries in the world.

As Restart Center's Director and as a psychologist, from patients I often receive lessons. Once a man said: *"I used to be a strong man, healthy, I served my country within my profession for more than 20 years, I was strong, and solid I could do so much, I could take care of my parents, my children and my wife. I was a man. Now look at me, I am nothing, I have nothing, not my family, a home, I cannot work, I have no life. I am explosive, broken, empty. Nothing. Sometimes I eat, I sit, wait...for what, I don't know. ...there is nothing to do but stare at the ceiling the whole day, thinking, thinking, too scared and worried to sleep. I have no life; this is a life worse than an animal's, not the life of a man. I am nothing, not even a human being. "I am free but I live in a prison without bars, without walls – in my mind I am imprisoned. What are human rights when I am nothing? What are my human rights if I am not even human?"*

Distinguished people, allow me to ask you one question, the question that comes to my mind and to the mind of those working by my side: **Are we doing enough to fight against torture?** Are we doing enough to prevent it? To avoid it? Are we doing enough to lessen the pain of the victims, to restore their dignity, to uphold their rights to reparation? Are we doing enough to ensure that torture is prosecuted? To guarantee justice for all and impunity for none? The answer is clear, and it is 'NO'. That is what keeps us restarting everyday our challenging work, aware of our limits, but with the conviction that doing nothing is not an option.

Syria is badly bleeding. *More than 150,000 people have been killed in the three-year war and the weekly updates of the UNHCR now count 2,841,524 refugees who sought protection in the Region. While 6.5 million mothers, daughters, grandfathers, brothers and sons displaced in Syria today are approximately 20 per cent of the total number of people internally displaced by conflict across the world.*

Syria's bleeding is also affecting my beloved country, Lebanon, with over a million of displaced Syrians escaping from horror... looking for safety and protection, hoping to find shelter or even a future that the hosting country cannot offer. Nobody chooses to be a refugee!

And there again lies the same question: **Are we doing enough to protect victims?** UN agencies, European Institutions, civil society organizations, we are doing a lot, but we can do more. Activate with no delay all diplomatic, political, and substantial mechanisms that can build lasting peace, establish effective ways to ensure humanitarian corridors and continue to support refugees, repair victims, work towards justice and an effective social reintegration *versus* social marginalization and neglect.

As President of the *International Rehabilitation Council for Torture victims (IRCT)* and as Vice-president of the *UN Sub-committee for the Prevention of Torture (UN SPT)*, my work is also to remind authorities that a society's human rights record is mirrored in the state of human rights protection in its places of detention. As Mandela once said "*No-one truly knows a nation until he has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens but how it treats its lowest.*".

We all need to join hands for a world free of torture, State and non-state actors, UN bodies, EU institutions... We need to work together through: awareness, advocacy, institutional reform, provision of support and also through education by partnering with Universities and schools to ensure that the children and youth of today, the future of tomorrow, are brought up and educated in the spirit of a torture-free world.

I have faced several challenges on my way here, but each one has strengthened my motivation and turned me into the woman standing in front of you today. How shall I pretend to be the woman that I am today without experiencing the grief, pain, and suffering of victims of torture, of refugees and all people deprived of their liberty? My hope is to make their voice heard.

I am grateful for all the vulnerable groups which gave me the privilege to work with them.

Please, allow me to offer this award not only to the victims of torture in all parts of the world, but also to those who fight tirelessly to eradicate it. It will happen one day!

Suzanne Jabbour