



RAFTO

The Rafto Prize Award Statement 22.09.2022

The Rafto Prize 2022 to Nodjigoto Charbonnel

- Fighting torture and defending the human rights of torture survivors

The Rafto Prize 2022 is awarded to Nodjigoto Charbonnel and his organization Association Jeunesse pour la Paix et la Non-Violence (AJPNV), “Youth for peace”, for their courageous struggle to abolish torture in Chad as well as internationally. In the context of authoritarianism, terrorism, war on terror and institutionalized violence, and at great personal risk, Charbonnel and his team assist survivors in rebuilding their lives after torture, and advocate the protection of human rights, and the prevention of torture and sexual violence by providing human rights education for youth and civil society.

A voice for the victims of torture

Since the year 2000, AJPNV has conducted programs for the rehabilitation of victims of torture, the promotion of peace and non-violence and the prevention of torture in Chad. The need is overwhelming: in 2021, the organization treated 575 torture survivors. AJPNV provides medical, psychological, and legal support, free of charge, to victims of torture and sexual violence to reduce its somatic, psychological, and social harm. They assist the reintegration of victims of sexual violence through vocational training and prevent torture through education on the effects of torture on the individual and on the society.

AJPNV encourages youth to participate in politics, women’s rights and the non-violent promotion of rule of law, and promotes the message of peace, human rights, democracy, and good governance.

About Nodjigoto Charbonnel

Nodjigoto Charbonnel (49) became familiar with the long-term harm and suffering caused by torture after his father survived mistreatment by state authorities. This experience motivated Charbonnel to found AJPNV. For 8 years he worked as an engineer at an international oil and gas production company, but in 2012 they terminated his contract because of his human rights work.

Charbonnel serves as the Sub-Saharan Africa Council member of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims and as a regional leader of the Global Human Rights Project. Due to his work, Charbonnel has been detained and imprisoned three times. He and his family have also suffered harassment by state agents. Despite the political repression, Charbonnel and his AJPNV team maintain a clear voice for the victims of torture and sexual violence:

“We reaffirm our commitment to shed light on those who commit torture, to expose their violation, to prevent future acts of torture, to ensure justice for survivors and to help them rebuild a life after the torture”. (- Nodjigoto Charbonnel)

Chad; a state of violence

In Chad, torture is institutionalized and normalized as a political tool, and rebellion is one of the few avenues available for social mobility. The institutionalized violence can be traced back to the slave economy, colonial rule and the post-independence civil war and struggles for political power. A milestone of justice was achieved when Chad's brutal ex-dictator Hissène Habré (1982-1990) was convicted and sentenced to life in 2016 by an African Union supported court. His conviction was the first trial ever to put a former African head of state into prison for human rights crimes. However, the victims have not yet been compensated and political violence and torture remain a feature of political life in Chad.

In April 2021 president Idriss Déby was killed in a military battle. He had then been the political and military leader of the country since ousting the dictator Hissène Habré in a military coup 30 years earlier. By ways of unconstitutional measures his son Mahamat Déby took over. Since then, a transitional military council has been ruling in a state of emergency. The security forces used excessive force against demonstrators, and hundreds were arrested. Charbonnel was forced into exile and AJPNV offices were closed. However, he quickly returned to the country and courageously continued the work.

Human rights work more risky

The military coup in 2021 rendered the work of human rights organizations like AJPNV even more risky. The human rights situation deteriorated alarmingly. Violations - including unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and extortion, – have increased with impunity as the general rule. Despite Déby's instrumental role in the prosecution of Habré and his security agents, he failed to support the rule of law and ensure basic human rights protection. Despite these difficult and hazardous circumstances, AJPNV, through their holistic anti-torture work, demonstrates that restoring the dignity and hope of torture survivors, cultivating a culture of peace and encouraging a truly democratic rule of law are vital parts of basic human rights. Combatting impunity for perpetrators, establishing reparations for victims and their families and rehabilitation for survivors are vital measures to combat torture.

Replacing rule of law with torture, terror, and fear

Article 5 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Even though states are obliged to protect the human rights of all its inhabitants, state authorities routinely and intentionally inflict cruel pain to persons to punish, intimidate and coerce them or a third person to confess, or to silence and suppress them.

Torture replaces rule of law with terror and fear and has a devastating effect on both human integrity and civil society. Torture is always illegal, but millions are harmed by torture in the hands of state security agents or armed non-state actors globally.

In Chad, violence against the people is committed by the militarized, autocratic state and its actors such as the army and gendarmerie, as well as by non-state actors. Several armed groups are seeking power, and the country is surrounded by countries in conflict and regional jihadist groups who operate across the borders. Chad's position as an island of relative stability in a turbulent region and as a key strategic ally in the “global war on terror” has constrained criticism from the international community of the brutal human rights abuses of the regime which suppresses dissent and maintains a firm grip on power.

A call for standing up against torture

The Rafto Prize 2022 is awarded to Nodjigoto Charbonnel and AJPNV to acknowledge their courageous work to combat torture and rebuild the lives of survivors in Chad. By awarding the prize to Charbonnel and the AJPNV, the Rafto Foundation highlights the crucial role of civil

society in standing up against torture and promoting human rights and rule of law as a premise for building a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic future.

The prize is also a call for international attention to the human rights situation in Chad. This country in the shadow of the war on terror, is neglected by both the international media and international aid.

The Rafto Foundation calls for the Chadian state to respect constitutional rule, ratify the protocol Against Torture, to bring to justice those responsible for torture, degrading human treatment and other cruel human rights abuses, and to take responsibility to support torture survivors through the rehabilitation process.

We call upon Norway to strengthen its global efforts for the abolition of torture and to improve the asylum rights and rehabilitation services for torture survivors in Norway and internationally. Finally, The Rafto Foundation calls upon the international community to put an end to impunity for torture, and to include the torture by non-state actors in the human rights law.

The Rafto Foundation, Bergen, Wednesday 17 August 2022.

The Rafto Prize will be presented at 18.00 on Sunday 13 November 2022 at The National Stage, Bergen.

About the Rafto Foundation

The Rafto Foundation for Human Rights is a non-profit, non-partisan organization working to promote human rights by presenting the Rafto Prize, empowering human rights defenders, challenging authorities, and the business community and by providing education in democracy and human rights. The foundation was established in 1987 in memory of Professor Thorolf Rafto (1922-1986) and has since then awarded 34 prizes to human rights defenders worldwide.

Website: www.rafto.org

Social media: [@raftofoundation](https://twitter.com/raftofoundation)

Sources:

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