

International Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims 24 March

Secretary-General's Message for 2014

On this day in 1980, human rights defender Monsignor Óscar Arnulfo Romero was assassinated. Each year, the international community honours his legacy by observing the Day for the Right to the Truth Concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims. Our commemorations defy the attempt by his murderers to silence his cries for justice and reinforce the importance of standing firm for fundamental freedoms.

This Day is also dedicated to honouring the memory of all victims of gross human rights violations, and to supporting all those who promote and protect human rights.

The right to truth is both individual and collective. Each victim has the right to know the truth and how violations affect them. Informing broader society about fundamental freedoms and how they have been violated is a vital safeguard against abuses recurring.

The United Nations supports a range of efforts to uncover the facts about gross violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and to promote justice, propose reparations and recommend reforms of abusive institutions. Over the past year we have supported Commissions of Inquiry on the Central African Republic, Syria and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, as well as the establishment of a Truth and Dignity Commission in Tunisia.

The right to the truth is linked to the rights to justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence. The Special Rapporteur appointed by the Human Rights Council in 2012 to advance these goals has analyzed selected challenges faced by truth commissions in transitional periods and has proposed responses to strengthen the effectiveness of those mechanisms.

On this International Day, I call for the vigorous implementation of all recommendations of commissions of inquiry and truth commissions in addressing gross human rights violations and serious violations of international humanitarian law. Let us recommit to working to help victims, their relatives and society as a whole to realize the right to truth – and to protecting those who fight to see the truth prevail.

Ban Ki-moon