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## **Leading rights defender named as UN expert to combat torture**



Special Rapporteur Juan Méndez

4 November 2010 – Human rights defender Juan Méndez of Argentina has taken over as the new United Nations independent expert on the scourge, vowing to help victims of torture.

“By insisting on the absolute prohibition of torture and of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in international law, I hope to make an effective contribution to the enforcement and progressive development of international norms in this area,” said the new Special Rapporteur on the use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in the world, who replaces Manfred Nowak of Austria.

Mr. Méndez has dedicated his long legal career to defending human rights and has a distinguished record of advocacy.

As a result of representing political prisoners, he was subjected to torture during an 18-month-long detention by the Argentinean military dictatorship. During this time, the non-governmental organization (NGO) Amnesty International adopted him as a 'Prisoner of Conscience.'

In 1977, he was expelled from his home country and moved to the United States, where he has worked in different capacities, including as legal counsel for Human Rights Watch, President of the International Center for Transnational Justice ([ICTJ](#)) and Scholar-in-Residence at the Ford Foundation in New York.

Mr. Méndez also served as the UN's first-ever Special Adviser on genocide prevention, with a mandate to collect existing information on serious violations of human rights that could lead to genocide and to bring potential genocidal situations to the attention of the Security Council. He served in that position from 2004 to 2007.

Special Rapporteurs report to the Geneva-based Human Rights Council and serve in an unpaid, independent capacity.

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