There is, and will continue to be, a need for people whose aim is to help those who have been subjected to torture and other traumatising experiences. This need did not change in 2018 – and this is where DIGNITY performs an immensely important task.

At DIGNITY’S clinic in Østerbro (Copenhagen), our highly experienced therapists and interpreters have helped many survivors of torture, traumatised refugees and members of their families.

And, around the world, skilled DIGNITY employees have been working hard on the rehabilitation of torture victims, the prevention of violence and torture, training collaborative partners and advocating for positive reforms and resolutions.

In 2018, there was praise for DIGNITY from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a comprehensive evaluation of the Danish commitment to human rights between 2006 and 2016. The report made it clear that Denmark’s, and not least DIGNITY’s, efforts in the fight against torture are valued and in demand all over the world.

Another result of which I am particularly proud is that, in August 2018, we entered into a cooperative agreement on the establishment of a new Master’s degree course in trauma therapy. The agreement was signed between DIGNITY and the University of Copenhagen in Denmark and the Primo Levi Centre and Descartes University in Paris. The agreement was signed on the occasion of French President Emmanuel Macron’s reception for Queen Margrethe at the Royal Danish Playhouse in Copenhagen. For many years, DIGNITY has been working to ensure the establishment of an academic qualification that will strengthen rehabilitation efforts internationally. The problem is that there is a severe shortage of therapists who specialise in the cross-disciplinary rehabilitation of torture victims.

2018 was – like the previous year – a year in which DIGNITY had to focus on the use of solitary confinement and isolation in Danish prisons and remand centres. Data from the Danish Prison and Probation Service show that the use of solitary confinement continues to set undesirable records. In 2016, there were 2,995 cases of placements in solitary confinement, while in 2017 the figure rose to 4,085 placements, an increase of 37%. In 2018, the figure rose yet again, to 4,752 placements. This is a deeply worrying development that goes against all recommendations from DIGNITY and other experts and international human rights bodies.

DIGNITY has also focused on the political decisions and bills that have ramifications for the torture victims we treat at the clinic. Among other things, these include a reduction in integration services and the introduction of interpreter’s fees in hospitals and in victims’ own GP surgeries. Measures like these create additional worries and problems for our patient group, and, consequently, barriers on their road to recovery and active participation in Danish society.

In the field of research, DIGNITY achieved impressive results in 2018. For example, a major study showed that Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) – a short-term type of therapy that DIGNITY uses in, for example, the Middle East and North Africa – significantly reduces the symptoms of PTSD in those undergoing treatment. The work of expanding this form of treatment is already well underway in many places, and, for the first time, a new process has been developed specifically geared towards refugee children who, in severely burdened and traumatised families, need psychological treatment and support.

I would like to end by expressing my deep and heartfelt thanks to everyone who, with contributions and other assistance, has helped underpin our work during the year. Your help and interest in our work is an invaluable prerequisite for us being able to continue the extremely difficult job of fighting torture.

Karin Verland, Director General of DIGNITY
MISSION, VISION & VALUES

MISSION
To ease the human suffering from torture, to prevent torture and to be a global force in the development of new knowledge about torture and its consequences

VISION
A world without torture and other forms of organised violence

VALUES
Credibility
Commitment
Courage
Cooperation
WHERE DIGNITY WORKS

DENMARK (HEAD OFFICE)
TUNISIA (COUNTRY OFFICE)
JORDAN (COUNTRY OFFICE)
ISRAEL/PALESTINE
EGYPT
MOROCCO
LEBANON
SIERRA LEONE
LIBERIA
UGANDA
KENYA
TANZANIA
CONGO
GHANA
SOUTH AFRICA
BANGLADESH
MYANMAR
THE PHILIPPINES
GUATEMALA
HONDURAS
EL SALVADOR
COLOMBIA

DIGNITY’S STRATEGIC THEMES

PREVENTION OF TORTURE IN DETENTION
DIGNITY works to ensure that people who are imprisoned or placed in other closed institutions are treated in accordance with international conventions and standards.

REHABILITATION
DIGNITY helps victims of torture and their families to achieve a better life.

PREVENTION OF TORTURE AND ORGANISED VIOLENCE IN URBAN AREAS
DIGNITY works to ensure that people living in unsafe slum areas can lead safer and dignified lives.

1 Project under DIGNITY’s Health Department
KEY FIGURES FROM REHABILITATION IN DENMARK

117 clients have completed a treatment with DIGNITY in 2018

52 men & 13 boys (under the age of 18)

43 women & 9 girls (under the age of 18)

Age of clients:
2 - 67 YEARS

Average duration of treatment:
10 - 12 MONTHS

Current waitlist:
80 PEOPLE
WHERE DIGNITY’S CLIENTS COME FROM

- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Algeria
- Argentina
- Bosnia
- Congo
- Denmark (spouses/children)
- Eritrea
- Former Yugoslavia
- Georgia
- Honduras
- Iraq
- Iran
- Kosovo
- Kurdistan
- Lebanon
- Morocco
- Montenegro
- Pakistan
- Palestine
- Poland
- Rwanda
- Serbia
- Somalia
- Syria
- Turkey
- Ukraine
- Yemen
Can you tell us a little bit about what it was you fled from?
We were forced to leave our home when the aircraft were bombing our houses. We had no water or electricity, and it was very difficult to get bread and the other basic things you need to survive. Therefore, we decided to leave Syria.

How did it feel when you arrived in Denmark?
I was extremely happy. I was no longer afraid that my children would leave the house and perhaps never come back again.

Why are you undergoing therapy with DIGNITY?
A child therapist came to our house and she could see that we needed help. My children were under great stress and strain. My children have been through things that adults would never be able to cope with.

Do you feel that you learn things in here that help you?
Yes, I do. I have never thought that I needed to look after myself. Here, I have reached the understanding that when I look after myself and am strong, then I am better able to look after my family. DIGNITY has taught me many, many techniques – mindfulness, for example. I should be able to enjoy a cup of coffee on my own, or go for a walk along the beach. I never thought of that before.

What are your hopes for the future?
I hope that my children receive a good education and can build a good life for themselves here in Denmark. So, the difficult time they experienced during the war can be replaced. As for myself, I hope I can have a better life, too. If I am there for my children, they will be fine – and I will feel even better.

Sophie is not her real name as the client wishes to remain anonymous. (Photograph: model/Stock Photo)
FOCUS ON FIGHTING TORTURE IN EUROPE

In 2018, DIGNITY was co-organiser of a major conference at which representatives from around 25 European countries gathered in Copenhagen to discuss the fight against torture in police custody.

At the conference, the focus was on specific initiatives and guarantees of legal rights that can prevent torture and the mistreatment of people in police custody. This could, for example, be the right to inform your family if you are arrested, the right to a lawyer, and the right to be examined by a doctor.

“More often than not, torture and other inhuman treatment occur during the first hours in which a person is detained, and it is unfortunately widespread in many police stations around Europe. There are also excellent examples of successful preventive measures, however. Therefore, it is hugely important and positive that Denmark is placing the focus on the legal and procedural guarantees that work,” says Therese Rytter, member of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) and legal manager at DIGNITY.

The conference was held in connection with Denmark’s presidency of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers, which had the fight against torture as one of five focus areas. The conference was arranged in collaboration with CPT and DIGNITY.

DIGNITY RESEARCHER WINS PRIZE FOR INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

In 2018, Maya Mynster Christensen, PhD, a researcher at DIGNITY, was awarded the Stephen Ellis Prize for the most innovative research article.

The Stephen Ellis Prize 2018 was awarded to researcher Maya Mynster Christensen for the research article “The Underbelly of Global Security: Sierra Leonean ex-militias in Iraq”.

The article argues that the western states’ warfare, and the private security firms that participate in the wars, depend on cheap labour from former colonies and post-conflict zones in the global South. The prize is awarded every year in respect of the article (published in African Affairs) that does the most to:

“Challenge existing preconceptions, raise issues of contemporary political importance, render complex topics accessible to broader audiences, or to introduce new ideas (whether theoretical, empirical or methodological) into African studies and the public understanding of Africa.”

The Prize Committee was formed by the editors of African Affairs, Gerrie ter Haar, Zachariah Mampilly and Nic Cheeseman.
BRIEF NEWS | PREVENTION AND RESEARCH

DIGNITY FORMS THE BASIS FOR COOPERATION IN KENYA’S URBAN SLUM AREAS

DIGNITY’s leadership programme in Kenya is leading to higher levels of respect and understanding between the police and the civilian sector. This is shown in an analysis published in the International Journal of Public Health in 2018.

"Without cooperation, the battle against violence cannot be won." That is the conclusion of a participant from the Kenyan municipality Naivasha after attending a workshop in connection with DIGNITY’s leadership programme. The course was attended by 43 managers from the police and civil society in the two municipalities Nakuru and Naivasha. The aim of the programme is to enable leaders to work together – and thereby prevent violence.

Results from the programme have since been analysed and published in the renowned publication, the International Journal of Public Health. The analysis showed that, prior to the start of the workshop, there were clear tensions between the police and civil society. The participants spoke of fear of the police, bureaucracy, corruption and general mistrust between the police and human rights activists.

Following the meetings, the participants had a more nuanced perception of the other participants. For example, one participant said: “Now, I am less afraid of the police; it has helped us interact with the police officers.”

The work is part of a larger, three-year programme in the field of leadership development established by DIGNITY, the Midrift Human Rights Network (MHRN) and the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom/Institute of Public Administration in Ireland.

KEY FIGURES FROM INSPECTION VISITS

In partnership with the Danish Parliament’s (Folketinget’s) Ombudsman and the Institute for Human Rights, DIGNITY carries out inspections of Danish prisons, remand centres and closed psychiatric wards. The visit scheme has been established under OPCAT (the UN’s Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture), which requires Denmark to establish a system for independent visits to all closed institutions. The purpose of the visits is to ensure that the detainees’ rights are not violated, and that they are not subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

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<td>Asylum and deportation centres</td>
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BRIEF NEWS | THE MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

NEW PROJECT WILL INCREASE SECURITY AND PREVENT VIOLENCE IN OLD QUARTER OF TUNIS

For young people, violence and uncertainty are an everyday occurrence in the old quarter of Tunis, Medina. A new DIGNITY project will provide the local community with the tools to turn this situation around.

Among other things, the project includes a collaboration with the local organisation L’art Rue which, through culture and performance, motivates young men to reach out to each other across the various quarters of Medina and thereby take responsibility for the creation of a secure and safe quarter.

“The aim is to make them feel that they have something to offer and are not merely left with the choice between radicalisation, criminality and migration,” says project manager Ahlam Chemlali.

Prior to the project, DIGNITY mapped out the problem of violence and the relevant collaborative partners across the spectrum of local players in the area, such as the municipality, the police and civil society organisations.

“Our experience shows that it makes sense to take action in an area in which there are local NGOs and the political will to instigate change on the part of the municipality,” says Ahlam Chemlali.

DIGNITY’s work in the Middle East and North Africa is supported by:

SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION RAISES AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEMS IN JORDAN AMONG THE UN’S MEMBER COUNTRIES

Cooperation between DIGNITY, the Institute for Human Rights and local society strengthens the UN Human Rights Council’s focus on Jordan.

Every four years, the UN’s member countries must take an “examination” in the Human Rights Council. Here, the organisation’s member countries can ask critical questions regarding a country’s compliance with human rights. The “examination” is called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

In 2018, it was Jordan’s turn – and the process was markedly different to what it had been previously. There was a significantly larger participation from local Jordanian organisations – particularly from youth and women’s organisations. Both DIGNITY and the Institute for Human Rights contributed to this engagement.

As part of the consortium work under the Danish-Arabic Partnership Programme, DIGNITY and the Institute for Human Rights offered advice and guidance to both the Jordanian civil society and the government in order to ensure that the process was as strong and effective as possible. Specifically, DIGNITY contributed by offering advice to the civil society organisations who, in connection with the “examination”, had to prepare a so-called shadow report for the UN that was able to place the focus on the most important and biggest human rights problems in Jordan.

The collaboration around the preparation of the report resulted in the criticisms from Jordanian civil society being taken up broadly by several UN member countries. For example, Ireland, Australia, Ukraine and Spain all urged Jordan to strengthen measures to prevent torture and ensure that the country’s laws and leaders do not allow torture cases to go unpunished.
In addition, DIGNITY is continuing its training in:

- narrative exposure therapy for adults
- pain school (a method that can help clients tackle and manage pain on a day-to-day basis)
- psychosocial therapy

Since October 2018, 16 Middle Eastern psychologists have been trained in the Net Kids method, which, by focusing on storytelling, helps children express their feelings and reduce PTSD levels. Since then, the 16 psychologists have helped 48 children using the method.

A total of 130 psychologists and other relevant professionals were trained in 2018 – since which they have helped 331 people.
Every year, we publish a range of scientific and non-scientific publications. An overview of our publications can be found on our website, dignity.dk.