

“The CPT at 25: taking stock and moving forward”
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As delivered

Tribute to the CPT

As the name of this event makes clear, the CPT's 25 year anniversary is about taking stock and moving forward.

But for me, before anything else, it is also about thanking the Committee and all those who have served on it – and all their staff – for everything they have done.

Together, these men and women have unearthed some of the gravest violations of human dignity on our continent.

They have been into thousands of prisons, police cells, psychiatric wards, immigration detention centres, now even onto removal flights, places where people can so easily be forgotten, but where the CPT says: no matter who you are, no matter what you did or didn't do, you have a basic right to live free from torture and other ill-treatment and we will strive to protect it because these are European and universal values.

So on behalf of myself, on behalf of the Secretary General who I know is sorry he cannot be here today: thank you.

I know I speak for many people throughout the Organisation when I say: your work makes us *all* extremely proud.

About the CPT

The CPT concept was first tabled in the Council of Europe in 1983 – when the Parliamentary Assembly supported the idea of some sort of preventative mechanism for torture.

Intensive drafting followed under the aegis of the Steering Committee for Human Rights, the CDDH, culminating in 1987 in the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

For the first time ever European states consented to outside experts entering places where, for whatever reason, individuals were deprived of their liberty.

And, since 1989 and the Convention's entry into force, the CPT has become a beacon across Europe for the protection of human rights.

Achievements

Since that time it has grown from 15 states to covering all 47.

Its work has helped shape recommendations of the Committee of Ministers and has helped develop standards now employed across Europe – not least the European Prison Rules.

It has advised Governments to change their laws so, for example, that people who commit torture do not go unpunished; so that individuals with severe mental health issues are treated with respect for their dignity.

The Committee's work has meant that facilities not fit for human beings have been closed down – and that new, better facilities were built in their place.

Its interventions have prompted governments to reform their penal systems, whether that means allowing inmates outdoors for at least an hour a day, or making sure they are engaged in meaningful activities, because prison is not just about punishment, but about rehabilitation too.

And – and this for me is the real secret of their success - the CPT has shown what can be achieved through *dialogue*.

Dialogue with the individuals who have lost their liberty. These are the main source of the Committee's findings.

Dialogue with the authorities of the countries visited – and it is a sign of the CPT's growing credibility that more and more of their reports are published. Under the Convention on the Prevention of Torture States are not obliged to permit publication, yet in the overwhelming majority of cases this now happens as standard practice.

And I should say that I sincerely hope that the authorities of Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation will follow this practice more systematically. Transparency is proof of our commitment to reform.

Finally, dialogue with other institutions:

with the European Court of Human Rights whose judgments increasingly make reference to the CPT's reports - over 300 do so, in fact.

with the Commissioner for Human Rights, with whom there are clear areas of joint concern, particularly in certain crisis situations.

and also with the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture, with whom there is a very good working relationship.

Challenges Ahead

So a huge amount has been achieved.

But there is still a great deal left to do – and all of us must renew our efforts.

Europe is not yet a torture free zone.

Police brutality in custody continues to be a major concern,

so does overcrowding in prisons.

Thousands of prisoners have just a mattress on the floor or share a bed with others. The minimum standard required by the CPT, 4m² per prisoner, is frequently not being met.

There are still too many cases of immigration detention centres in which living conditions are simply unacceptable.

On these problems and more, we must continue to work together.

For our actions to have the biggest impact, the three pillars of Council of Europe intervention must be closely linked – monitoring, assistance to member States and the framing of standards. This is when we are at our best.

The CPT's recommendations and standards will continue to shape our action plans and other co-operation activities with member States.

Likewise, intergovernmental standard-setting work must continue to be guided by the CPT standards and to gain by its expertise. I am thinking especially of the work in hand on prison overcrowding and radicalisation.

And we will continue to work directly with member States to help them develop their own National Preventative Mechanisms – where we need real energy and political will.

NPMs are crucial – the CPT cannot be everywhere at once.

It is not easy.

National oversight bodies can struggle to stay independent from state authorities, or simply lack adequate resources

They can lack the expertise needed to conduct sensitive inspections – sometimes with terrible consequences.

If, for example, inspectors fail to properly protect the identities of the people they speak to prisoners and whistle-blowers suffer serious reprisals when they have gone.

But there are also excellent examples to learn from.

I hope our French guests will not mind me saying that when the CPT conducted its first visits in France in 1991, there was very little by way of monitoring or inspection. No-one really knew what was going on behind bars.

Yet as a result of sustained political commitment, proper resourcing and talented people, France now boasts one of the most advanced independent national inspection regimes: *Contrôleur général des lieux de privation de liberté*.

Yes, problems need to be solved. Some French prisons are notoriously overcrowded. But at least the challenges can finally be seen – and I hope others will draw from this too. Before I conclude I wish to make one final point.

The CPT continues to face a serious and specific challenge posed by unresolved conflict zones: geographical areas where the Committee encounters difficulties in exercising its mandate or is even prevented from doing so.

We are clear in our position:

The Committee must be able to carry out its monitoring role unimpeded in all such areas.

The principle of co-operation enshrined in the Convention should form the basis for finding, in good faith, solutions with the member States concerned, in the sole interest of upholding the protection of individuals against all forms of ill-treatment. I call on all States concerned to act in this spirit.

Let me end on a note of shared responsibility, reaffirming our commitment for the future.

Erasing torture and inhuman or degrading treatment from Europe continues to be of major importance to the Council of Europe.

I look forward to the ideas, the discussion and the debate we will have today, because we want to build on our success and improve however we can. There can be no greater mission than the pursuit of human dignity *for all*.

Thank you