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## **Ceremony for the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)**

### **Speech by Dunja Mijatović**

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Strasbourg, 4 November 2019

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honoured to address you today, at this ceremony marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

On this round anniversary of the CPT, I would like to pay tribute to those who were at the origins of the idea to have an independent body empowered to visit places of deprivation of liberty without restriction, anywhere in Europe, to meet with the people who are held there and talk to them in private, and to report on the findings to the authorities. Like many ideas that have led to concrete action in the human rights field – the abolition of slavery, the fight against enforced disappearances, women's rights, the rights of people with disabilities - this idea comes from civil society. I would like to pay tribute to our friends from the Association for the Prevention of Torture, as well as the many human rights defenders who have worked tirelessly and sometimes in highly risky situations, to protect their fellow human beings from torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

A lot of work has been done over the last thirty years, good, meaningful work by professional and dedicated people. The mechanism that the CPT pioneered is a unique one, and I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that it set the gold standard for fact-finding missions to different types of places of deprivation of liberty. Again, I would like to give credit to the people behind this endeavour, the members of the Committee with their wide-ranging expertise in various fields, and the hard-working and competent Secretariat of the CPT that keeps the mechanism running.

Thirty years is not enough, because this kind of work is never done. We cannot afford to be complacent. There is simply too much at stake. Poorly managed prisons where inmates are mistreated are factories for future social upheaval or violence. Police violence alienates communities and undermines trust in state institutions. As for the conditions in which migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are held, I have just returned from Greece, where I visited the islands of Lesbos and Samos, as well as Korinthos on the Peloponnese, and had talks with the authorities in Athens.

I recently spoke out about the urgent need to address the deplorable situation of the migrants in the improvised camp in Vučjak in my home country of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I will continue to advocate for systemic and human rights-compliant solutions at European level.

When it comes to preventing torture and ill-treatment, as well as combating impunity against human rights violations committed by state actors, the fundamental importance of institutions like the CPT and the National Preventive Mechanisms present here today cannot be overstated.

However, there is also the need to engage at a political level. In the end, it is the political leaders who bear the bulk of the responsibility to ensure that people deprived of their liberty are treated humanely, and that impunity is not given a chance to set in. It is particularly important to require that the discourse, attitudes and messages that come from the highest state officials and those in charge of security structures fully reflect this principle, as their instructions and public positions are rarely ignored by their subordinates. It is indeed extremely damaging to public trust in state institutions when law enforcement officials convicted of misconduct involving ill-treatment or any other serious violation of human rights are either pardoned or receive inadequate sanctions.

I will continue to remind state authorities about the absolute prohibition against torture, that they have the duty to ensure that anyone deprived of his or her liberty must be treated humanely and in decent conditions. You can count on me to amplify your message, to push for having CPT reports published, and to give a boost to national preventive mechanisms or other bodies that fulfil a similar role.

The fight against torture is a painstaking process that bears fruit over the long term. Unfortunately, it takes a much shorter time to squander achievements and revert to inhumane and inhuman methods. Let us do our utmost not to allow this to happen over the next thirty years. The task is huge, but not impossible. I am your ally in this effort.