

## **CONF/PRES/SPEECH(2019)05**

### **Speech of Anna Rurka, President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, at the ceremony of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) 30th anniversary**

Madam Secretary General, Mr President of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to thank the CPT for the work carried out for 30 years and acknowledge this mechanism's contribution to the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The functioning of this mechanism has been enabled by the sustained action of NGOs, always played out in a dialectical relationship between state reality and the human rights-based humanist idealism that guides all of the Council of Europe's work. The NGOs have been and continue to be ambitious when it comes to the efficiency of the legal system in Europe. If we want to enhance the effectiveness of human rights in places of deprivation of liberty, the impact of the preventive mechanisms must be reinforced. To that end, backing and support for national preventive mechanisms are indispensable. Cooperation with NGOs, at both national and Council of Europe level, continues to be a factor of success for the entire convention-based system. Another key factor is appropriate communication at all levels, including to the voluntary sector providing a vigilant presence at grassroots level which facilitates the work and response capacity of the CPT and national mechanisms for preventing torture.

Across the world, binding and non-binding legal instruments, regional or international, reiterate the importance of monitoring places of deprivation of liberty in general and by civil society in particular. In this context, the NGOs have an important added value compared to national preventive mechanisms and the CPT itself as their direct and constant presence on the ground puts them in a position to carry out independent and regular monitoring and forge relations of trust with detainees. They also provide legal assistance, humanitarian aid, human contact and a link to the outside world, all of which are essential for the respect of those persons' dignity. They are also ideally placed to raise public awareness of living conditions and treatment in these places. There are many examples of excellent cooperation in cases where NGOs are regarded as partners and experts on the matters examined by anti-torture mechanisms. And yet it is regrettable to see that it is becoming increasingly difficult for these organisations, which are sometimes even penalised for their efforts.

Finally, allow me to underline once again the importance of monitoring work in connection with new and/or ongoing issues, which include the questions of gender in places of deprivation of liberty, overcrowding in prisons, children and vulnerable groups placed in closed institutions and separated from their families, torture on migration routes and inhuman and degrading treatment in migrant holding facilities and, as we have heard today, safeguards for fundamental rights in police detention and custody. Public trust in the law enforcement agencies and state institutions is a factor in social cohesion. The more people

perceive the actions of these institutions as proportionate and respectful of rights, the more those actions will be seen as legitimate and worthy of their trust. I hope that we will have the strength and determination to build a Europe based not on security or the fight against terrorism and crime alone but on a desire for social cohesion, for which the Council of Europe triumvirate of human rights, democracy and the rule of law are the watch-words.

Thank you for your attention