

Brussels, 26 June 2007

26 June - International Day against Torture

The fight against torture: a key priority for the EU

The prevention and the eradication of all forms of torture and ill-treatment within the EU and worldwide is one of the main objectives of the EU human rights policy. The EU Guidelines on Torture, adopted in 2001, provide the general framework for EU action in this area towards third countries, as well as in multilateral human rights fora. These Guidelines foresee the use of all available tools of diplomacy and co-operation, most notably through political dialogue, demarches and assistance under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and the EU pursues a policy of raising the issue of torture systematically with third countries. The EU is currently carrying out its "Global action plan" on torture, consisting in demarches to all countries on the issue of torture and ill-treatment. Issues raised in the course of these demarches include the ratification or implementation of the UN Convention against Torture (UNCAT), pending requests to visit from the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and torture issues and cases relevant to the specific country.

The prevention of torture and the rehabilitation of torture victims is a major priority for funding under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). This also includes funding for torture rehabilitation centres inside the EU. Over the last 5 years, an average of €11,7 million per year has been allocated to funding torture projects (€22.6 million in 2005-06), thereby making the EIDHR the leading source of funding for civil society projects aiming at the rehabilitation of victims and the prevention of torture worldwide. The projects selected are designed to reinforce EU policy, for example, awareness-raising on the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT), investigation into the supply of torture technology and support to the rehabilitation of torture victims.

The EIDHR is currently providing support to torture rehabilitation activities in 41 countries worldwide, including support to 20 torture rehabilitation centres and networks in 16 EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

In the EIDHR Strategy Paper for 2007-2010, currently under discussion with Member States and the European Parliament, the Commission proposes to allocate €44 million over the next four years to the fight against torture (€11 million annually). A substantial share of these funds will be allocated to torture rehabilitation centres, inside and outside the EU, in full consistency with past practice.

EU member states responsibility

The absolute ban on torture and ill-treatment is reflected in Article 4 of the Charter on Fundamental Rights of the EU, which states that “No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” and Article 3 of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms with an identical wording.

As Members of the Council of Europe, EU Member States have all ratified the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture which provides for visits to places of detention by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). The EU actively supports the valuable work of the Council of Europe in this area – inter alia through granting full access by the CPT to all places of detention and fully complying with its recommendations.

Member States are legally obliged under the EC Directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers (article 20) to ensure that torture survivors receive necessary treatment. As a result of a recent EU-wide survey, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) has concluded that only a minority of member states comply with their obligations by providing sufficient funding to national rehabilitation centres and through their development aid. IRCT has also denounced the insufficient contribution by member states to the UN Voluntary Fund for Torture Victims (UNVFT), which represents the second main source of funding for centres around the world after the EIDHR.

Torture victims in the EU

In spite of an absolute ban on torture and ill-treatment, enshrined in the International Bill of Rights and in the UN Convention against Torture, the practice of torture and other forms of ill-treatment remains widespread. According to Amnesty International, **102** countries had cases of torture and ill-treatment by security forces, police and other state authorities in 2006.

IRCT evaluates the number of torture survivors in the EU at roughly 400.000, the vast majority of which are refugees. IRCT considers that only 16.000 of these individuals receive medical, psychological and social support on an annual basis. It is also estimated that around 20% of asylum seekers in the EU have been subjected to some form of violence or torture.

For more information:

EU's Human rights & Democratisation Policy:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/torture/index.htm

EU guidelines on torture:

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/torture/guideline_en.htm

Amnesty International:

<http://www.amnesty.org/>

IRCT:

<http://www.irct.org/>