

Tackling corruption a priority in fight against torture - UN rights experts

NEW YORK/GENEVA (21 October 2014) - States must do more to tackle corruption as part of efforts to prevent and eliminate torture and ill-treatment, a key UN torture prevention body says.

“There is a clear connection between torture, ill-treatment and corrupt practices. Effective torture prevention must tackle corrupt practices too,” said Malcolm Evans, Chairperson of the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture.

Mr Evans was speaking as he presented the SPT’s annual report to the General Assembly’s Third Committee in New York on Tuesday. The SPT has a mandate to visit places of detention in States that have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

The SPT’s report notes that in States with higher levels of corruption, there may be less likelihood of torture and ill-treatment being either discovered or prosecuted.

“The incidents of torture and ill-treatment around the world are not diminishing and the need for effective prevention is as great as it ever has been,” Mr Evans said. But, he added, preventive work appeared to be getting more challenging from a practical perspective.

“States have very clear Convention commitments, yet we have experienced increasing delays in being provided with the information and facilities which are necessary to undertake visits efficiently and, for the first time, we found it necessary to suspend one of our full visits, to Azerbaijan, due to repeated problems in securing immediate and unimpeded access to places of detention,” he said.

Mr Evans welcomed the increase in the number of States ratifying the Optional Protocol, which currently totals 74. However, he highlighted that due to lack of resources in the UN Human Rights Office, which supports the SPT’s work, they were only able to conduct three full visits during 2013, and schedule three this year.

“Frankly, this number of visits is far too few to enable the SPT to properly fulfil its mandate. At this pace, States will receive a full regular visit only once in 25 years,” he said. The lack of follow-up visits also made it difficult to establish to what degree the

SPT's recommendations and those of independent national monitoring bodies, known as National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs), were being implemented.

Despite these challenges, the SPT Chairperson welcomed the newly launched Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI), spearheaded by Chile, Denmark, Ghana, Indonesia and Morocco, and supported by many other States and expressed the hope that it would spur countries to ratify the Optional Protocol.

“The Optional Protocol is not just a source of abstract legal obligations. It establishes a set of practical tools, in the form of the independent national preventive mechanisms which work with the SPT and with the States Parties in a collaborative fashion based on a shared commitment to take effective measures to make torture and ill-treatment less likely, if not inexistent.”

ENDS

BACKGROUND:

The SPT's role is to prevent and eliminate torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment of detainees. It has a mandate to visit all States that are parties to OPCAT and to make recommendations to the authorities to provide for effective safeguards against torture and ill-treatment of persons deprived of their liberty.

At the end of a country mission, the SPT communicates its recommendations and observations to the State by means of a confidential report, and if necessary to NPMs. States parties are encouraged to request that the SPT makes these reports public.

A State party must create a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), a body to monitor places of detention by organising regular visits, a year after ratifying the Optional Protocol.

Find out more about the Optional Protocol:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/opcat/index.htm>

For more information about the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/OPCAT/Pages/OPCATIndex.aspx>

For more information and media requests please contact:

In New York:

Mattias Pellado, +41 784 445 172 / mpellado@ohchr.org

André-Michel Essoungou, +1 917 367 9995 / Cell: +1 917 940 0685 / essoungou@un.org

Nenad Vasic + 1 212 963 5998 / Cell: +1 917 941 7558 / vasic@un.org

In Geneva:

Joao Nataf, + 41 (0) 22 917 9102 / jnataf@ohchr.org

Liz Throssell, +41 (0) 22 917 9466/ ethrossell@ohchr.org