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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) should put torture prevention at the heart of its work on the human dimension*

BRUSSELS, 14 April 2014: At the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SDHM) on Prevention of Torture held in Vienna, Austria, on 10 and 11 April, the NGO Coalitions against Torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and their project partners, the Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and the NGO International Partnership for Human Rights, called on OSCE member states to make eradication of torture a priority concern.

In [three statements to this meeting](#), the Central Asian NGO Coalitions summarized their main concerns and recommendations on how to tackle the persistent nature of torture in their countries. They made recommendations to improve independent monitoring of detention facilities, in particular by recently established National Preventive Mechanisms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and they formulated a number of recommendations to OSCE institutions and member states aimed at eradicating torture.

Juan E. Méndez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who addressed participants of the SDHM as keynote speaker, stated that in his view no further standards setting is needed to eradicate torture. Instead, the main emphasis should now be on implementing existing standards.

The NGO Coalitions against Torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also urged their governments to focus on implementing their treaty obligations and recommendations by UN human rights mechanisms and procedures. In particular, they urged their governments to provide for the main safeguards of detainees against torture, such as immediate access to a lawyer, routine medical examinations, and access to a judge within 48 hours after the moment of detention to inquire about the detainee's treatment in custody.

Mark Thompson, the Secretary General of the NGO Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), highlighted that since the last SHDM in 2003, the greatest progress with regard to torture prevention in the OSCE region has been the coming into force of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and the establishment of National Preventive Mechanisms (NPM). Currently, 39 out of 57 OSCE states are parties to the Optional Protocol and 36 NPMs have been established. The Special Rapporteur on Torture reported that the government of Tajikistan had recently pledged to establish an NPM in the near future.

However, as Voislav Stojanovski of the NGO Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, pointed out, many NPMs face challenges to their independence and some NPMs do not reflect the requirements under the Optional Protocol, but are rather masks that obscure these

* This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union, Open Society Foundations and National Endowment for Democracy within the project "Promotion of freedom from torture in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan". The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the project partners and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union, Open Society Foundations and National Endowment for Democracy.



deficiencies.

The NGO Coalitions against Torture in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stressed that special problems arise when NPMs are set up within an Ombudsman's institution before such institutions become truly independent, as per the Paris Principles ("Ombudsman+").

The NGO Coalitions called on the authorities of Kazakhstan to ensure that the NPM in Kazakhstan is provided with full independence of the executive branch of power, including that it is financially autonomous. They urged the authorities of Kyrgyzstan to provide the NPM of that country with the necessary financial, human and material resources to fulfil its mandate independently and effectively.

Malcolm Evans, the Chairman of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT), proposed that the OSCE could provide a platform for the NPM, the authorities and the SPT to bring about implementation of the SPT's recommendations to Kyrgyzstan. The authorities recently gave permission for the report the SPT had written following its visit to Kyrgyzstan in 2013 to be made public.