



association pour la prévention de la torture
asociación para la prevención de la tortura
association for the prevention of torture

Press release

Swiss OSCE presidency advances the prevention of torture

Switzerland is concluding a politically turbulent year as the chair of the OSCE. In the shadow of the crisis in Ukraine, Switzerland has made remarkable headway in placing the issue of prevention of torture on the OSCE agenda.

Geneva 20 November 2014. During 2014, Switzerland made torture prevention a high-standing item on the OSCE agenda, as part of its overall priority of “improving people’s lives”. At the upcoming Ministerial Council meeting in Basel 4-5 December, participating States have the opportunity to make sure that torture prevention stays a concern in the region for the years to come.

The issue of torture prevention has been addressed at a number of OSCE high-level events in 2014. National torture prevention mechanisms and civil society organisations have been given the opportunity to participate and come up with recommendations on how to further strengthen the OSCE’s work to protect the rights of persons deprived of their liberty. The Swiss Chairpersonship has now announced its intention to submit a decision on torture prevention to OSCE participating States for the Basel Ministerial Council.

Mark Thomson, Secretary General of the Geneva-based *Association for the Prevention of Torture* (APT) welcomes the initiative:

“A ministerial decision on torture prevention would be an outstanding achievement for the Swiss Chairpersonship. This should consolidate the important advances made during the year, that will have a concrete impact on the work of the OSCE.”

He mentions in particular the efforts to address the problem of ill-treatment in police custody and to highlight the specific vulnerabilities of certain persons when they are detained, such as women, children, migrants or LGBTI persons. A way to ensure a continuous effort would be the creation of a torture prevention focal point within the OSCE.

During this year's presidency the Swiss government has been able to obtain wide support for the international system to prevent torture created by the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT). The OPCAT obliges States to set up national torture prevention bodies to monitor prisons, police stations and other places of detention. Addressing the UN Security Council in February 2014, Swiss President Didier Burkhalter called the OPCAT “*a fundamental instrument for combating torture*”. Mark Thomson agrees:

“There have been clear advances in the region and 40 out of the 57 OSCE countries have now ratified the OPCAT. But we still see daily reports of abuses of some of the most vulnerable people in our society, those deprived of their liberty.”

He continues:

"We need to remember that torture is toxic to any society that tolerates it. If it is not addresses properly it breaks down trust in the community for generations to come. The OPCAT helps States to solve the underlying problems that lead to abuses, with a very concrete, independent oversight system. Our priority is therefore to get all the remaining 17 States in the OSCE region to ratify this treaty and to make sure it's fully implemented. Let's join forces to make sure that the efforts to prevent torture within the OSCE do not end with the Swiss Chairpersonship, and that Serbia maintains it as a top priority in 2015."

-ENDS-

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About the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT):

The Association for the Prevention of Torture was founded in 1977 by the Swiss banker Jean-Jacques Gautier (1912-1986). The APT works to enable actors worldwide to effectively prevent torture and ill-treatment and has played a fundamental role in the development of regional and international anti-torture treaties, in particular the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT). For more information on the APT and on the OPCAT see www.apt.ch.