MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE PROVEDOR OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND JUSTICE, THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND THE APT- SIGNING CEREMONY

October 6, 2020

Statement by Barbara Bernath, Association for the Prevention of Torture

Excellency Minister of Justice, Mr. Manuel Cárceres da Costa

Excellency Ms Jesuina Maria Ferreira Gomes, Provedora for Human Rights and Justice, Timor Leste,

Distinguished guests, dear friends,

In the name of the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), it is a pleasure and an honour to participate today in this ceremony for the signature of this important MoU, in support of our significant ongoing cooperation on torture prevention in Timor-Leste.

I am sorry not to be able to be with you in person in Dili to sign it, due to the pandemic affecting us here and prohibiting travel to your country that has managed to stay safe.

This MOU reflects the evolution of our cooperation with Timor Leste over the years. It started with the Provedor for Human Rights and Justice back in 2013 with the "Torture Prevention Ambassador Project" and features the recent development of torture prevention guidelines for the South East Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum, chaired by the PDHJ last year.

Today we are signing a tripartite agreement of cooperation. This is the symbol of our way of working, where the government –the Ministry of Justice, the oversight body – the PDHJ – and an international Non Governmental Organisations – the APT- are joining forces to prevent torture. This MoU with Timor Leste is a model for our cooperation with other countries in South East Asia and globally. It is in line with our Strategic Plan promoting constructive dialogue and with our values of partnership and empowerment, inclusion and equality.

This MoU also builds on Timor-Leste's advances in the fight against torture and ill-treatment. Following the ratification of the Convention against Torture, the country criminalized torture and other ill-treatment in the Constitution and Penal Code. It also took practical measures such as the establishment of the Police Forensic and Criminal Investigations Unit, the MOJ's prison support service network or the introduction of CCTV in some prison settings. Furthermore, Timor Leste is also spearheading efforts to address gender-based violence and mainstreaming the rights of persons with disabilities.

In this promising context, we are keen to work together with the PDHJ and the MOJ towards the development of a national torture prevention strategy. By means of education, awareness-raising, research and data systematization and technical assistance, we will achieve important progress in support of effective torture prevention.

In concluding, I would like to extend a warm thanks to the Minister of Justice Dr Manuel Carceres da Costa and to The Provedora, Ms Jesuina Maria Ferreira Gomes and their representatives in the PDHJ and MOJ as well as my colleagues at the APT, in particular Shazeera Zawawi, Sylvia Dias and Andra Nicolescu for their efforts in making this cooperation a reality.

Today's event is more than a signature, it is the start of a journey towards building together a Timor Leste free from torture, free from violence, free from fear, with strong institutions and where no one is left behind. This is the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the President of Timor Leste said in his recent speech to the UN General Assembly "Cooperation and partnership, both at the regional and national levels, are crucial to build a resilient, sustainable and inclusive world. Together we will come on stronger and we will win as human kind"

Thank you very much for your attention. Muito obrigada and Terima kasih.

Barbara Bernath, Secretary General, Association for the Prevention of Torture

Geneva, 6.10.2020