



- **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

International Women's Day: Putting an end to humiliating and degrading body searches

Geneva, 7 March 2014. In many countries, women and children who visit family members in prison are insulted, stripped naked and forced into humiliating body positions. Women are often subjected to vaginal and anal inspections. Unfortunately, these searches are not isolated events, but rather patterns of systematic behavior within many prison systems. The bodies of female relatives become tools to humiliate and punish also those deprived of their liberty.

These humiliating searches have clearly not been effective in reducing the number of prohibited objects taken into places of deprivation of liberty. Neither do they improve security and order. They are a form of sexual violence, and are a clear violation of the right to integrity and human dignity. They also contribute to disrupting affective family ties between those deprived of their liberty and their loved ones, which has a negative impact on the reinsertion process. Some detainees even prefer not to receive any visits, rather than exposing their wives, mothers, sisters and daughters to painful body searches.

Today, on International Women's Day, the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), therefore calls on States to take immediate action to **halt these degrading and illegal searches**. We remind all States of their obligation to apply international standards and norms referring to deprivation of liberty. In the particular case of women, this means to fully observe the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).

"They told me to open my legs, open my anus, remove my pubic hair, crouch three times frontwards; three times backwards... there was a flashlight to look inside my vaginal cavity. Pregnant women, elderly, children, all of them had to get naked."

Woman visiting a prison in Brazil