



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2016 Penal Reform International, Working Session 8 – Rule of Law

Oral statement on preventing radicalisation in prisons

Thank you Mr/Mme Chair

The issue of how to manage violent extremist offenders in prison and the risk of radicalisation in prisons has become increasingly prominent in recent years and is especially relevant in the light of the forthcoming Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE placing the fight against radicalisation as its main priority. Penal Reform International would therefore like to input some considerations to this debate, drawing in particular on two roundtables organised by our offices in Jordan and Kazakhstan.

We want to stress, first and foremost, that a human-rights based approach is key to addressing this problem. Efforts to preventing radicalisation that are based exclusively on security and control are not sufficient. Rather, our response must be grounded in international human rights law and standards, and the rule of law.

This is because when prisoners are dealt with humanely rather than alienated by neglect and ill-treatment, it becomes more difficult to recruit prisoners for violent extremist causes. In overcrowded, dilapidated prisons, on the other hand, and where prisoners experience discrimination based on their faith or origin, recruiters for extremist groups find it easier to attract followers.

Counter-radicalisation programmes should be part of an overall prison reform plan that includes: good prison management practices; proper filing and classification systems; quality prison conditions, including infrastructure and living conditions; and rehabilitation programmes. It also requires a wider criminal justice system that is fair and is seen to be fair.

Generally, measures to address security concerns for this group of prisoners are the same as for other prisoners, including high-risk prisoners. It is likely that radicalised or violent extremist prisoners are engaging in the same power-seeking and acquisitive behaviour that in other circumstances would be met by dominating others or joining prison gangs.

Assessing and addressing such risks requires prison staff that are well selected and trained in human rights-based approaches to managing and treating such prisoners, as well as tools to aid assessment and classification of prisoners. Training involves being able to recognise signs of radicalisation, understand the complexities of reintegration and rehabilitation measures, and secure their own safety and the safety of inmates, as required by the Nelson Mandela Rules. Classification and assessment tools need to take into account the capacity and available resources of the penitentiary system and respond to the local context and the size of the problem. Particular tools may be necessary for specific groups, such as women or child prisoners.

Efforts to counter religiously inspired radicalisation need to include faith-based dialogues between prisoners and well-qualified personnel, such as priests or imams. It should also involve working closely with communities, both during and after imprisonment, so that there are positive models for reintegration. Existing good practice models are sorely needed, particularly those that are not prohibitively expensive. International collaboration and exchange of experiences are a necessity in this respect.

Finally, we need to understand the root causes of radicalisation, work on prevention programmes and address alienation. This will both help to prevent further radicalisation and enable the de-radicalisation and better rehabilitation of this group of prisoners, including through post-release after-care programmes.

PRI stands ready to assist in developing and promoting programmes for deradicalisation of prisoners and prevention of violent extremism in prisons.

Thank you, Mr/ Mme Chair.