



IRCT Statement to Working Session No. 8

Rule of Law I: The prevention of torture OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 2-13 October 2006

**International
Rehabilitation
Council for
Torture Victims**

OSCE member States must increase their support to the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture

- The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims is an independent health professional umbrella organisation that promotes and supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and works for the prevention of torture worldwide. Comprising a membership comprises some 130 rehabilitation centres and programmes in over 80 countries we enjoy consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council and participatory status with the Council of Europe and the OSCE.
- The UNVFVT is the world's second largest source of funding for NGOs working with victims of torture. The Fund depends on voluntary contributions from governments, NGOs and individuals. In 2005 it had a budget of USD 7.3 million to be distributed amongst treatment centres and programmes providing rehabilitation services and humanitarian assistance to torture survivors, only surpassed by the European Union, which in 2005 had a budget of app. EUR 8 million for the purpose. The Fund, which is administered by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, currently supports some 187 projects worldwide. In recent years a total of 65 countries have supported the Fund, eighteen of which contribute regularly. The largest single donor to the Fund is the United States with a contribution of USD 6.5 in 2005*
- The IRCT is currently implementing a project with the aim of encouraging governments – particularly OSCE members – to increase their support to the UNVFVT. Among other things, we work to raise awareness amongst parliamentarians, policy makers and the media about how governmental contributions to the Fund are essential for ensuring the financial stability of treatment centres and programmes for torture survivors worldwide. All activities under the project are carried out in close collaboration with the Fund in order to ensure maximum impact and relevance. The project is sponsored by the Sigrid Rausing Trust.

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Key problems

*The IRCT enjoys
consultative status
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of Europe.*

- Every year the UNVFVT receives requests for a total amount equalling twice its available budget.
- The UNVFVT is one of only two major sources of funding for rehabilitation of torture survivors worldwide. This leaves rehabilitation centres and programmes – particularly in the South – vulnerable to any reduction in the Fund’s budget.
- The UNVFVT is an essential source for enabling the initiation of new projects in countries where rehabilitation services are scarce or non-available (generally outside Europe, e.g. in places like Iraq and Afghanistan).
- Due to its limited resources the UNVFVT’s funding cycle is annual. Therefore, applicants are forced to spend large amounts of time and energy each year on filling in long, complex applications. This is particularly problematic in the South where many centres do not have a separate fundraising department. In these cases, doctors and other health professional staff spend valuable time and resources on fundraising rather than treatment.

Recommendations

- There is an urgent need to expand the Fund’s donor base and to increase existing contributions. The IRCT urges all OSCE member States to increase their financial support to the UNVFVT in order to enable the Fund to provide sustainable, long-term funding to rehabilitation centres and programmes worldwide with a special focus on the South.
- Moreover, OSCE member states must ensure the financial viability of rehabilitation centres and programmes within their own borders. States have the responsibility to ensure that the torture survivors receive rehabilitation, an adequate for of reparation and that the perpetrators are brought to justice. Furthermore, we wish to recall EU States the EU 2003/9/EC minimum standards of reception of asylum seekers which establishes that States shall ensure necessary medical treatment for victims of torture and other forms of ill treatment.

* In 2004 the government of Denmark initiated an evaluation of the Fund. The issues addressed included:

- Consistency of the application of the definition of torture
- Multi-year funding cycles and improved funding cycles
- Use of the Board of Trustees
- Geographical balance in grant allocation
- Requirements of eligibility of applicants
- Staffing and staff training
- Donor relations.

The IRCT welcomed the resulting report’s recommendations for change and added comments of its own, emphasising the necessity to maintain focus on funding rehabilitation of victims

of torture as opposed to broadening the scope to include advocacy and preventive activities (for which alternative funding sources are available). The evaluation has generated positive results including the appointment of a new board of trustees whose members' expertise reflects the changes proposed in the evaluation report. The new board has been charged with new functions, including fundraising, and has effectuated many of the report's recommendations. *Inter alia*, funding cycles have been changed; some 75 % of the funded centres have been visited and reviewed; and efforts to support centres in the South are being prioritised.

