



**STATEMENT FOR THE OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
WORKING SESSION 4: RULE OF LAW II
FROM THE
INTERNATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL FOR TORTURE VICTIMS (IRCT)**

Mr Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Earlier this year, at the 10th Session of the Human Rights Council, the Council passed a resolution that emphasises that States must take more persistent and effective measures to combat torture. In particular, the resolution noted that independent forensic examinations are critical to the identification and prosecution of torture cases, and called upon States to ensure that education and information on torture is included in the training of health professionals who may be involved in examining, treating or assessing persons at risk for torture.

We at the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims – a membership organisation with 144 torture rehabilitation centres in 73 countries – could not agree more with the Council's recommendations. Years of IRCT experience in training professionals across governmental and civil society sectors - including those in OSCE member countries - have led us to two startling conclusions. The first is that in many countries, health professionals often lack specific knowledge about torture and its consequences. Many falsely believe the myths surrounding its practice: for example, that torture is not systemic, that it is necessary in the interests of protecting national security, and that so-called "soft" forms of torture or "torture lite" don't cause lasting physical or psychological damage to victims. The second conclusion we've made is that many health practitioners do not understand their role in investigating and documenting torture allegations. This is particularly true of those working for state Ministries of Health, who often face dual obligations and may be torn between their loyalties toward the state versus the patient. As a remedial measure, the IRCT has initiated a specialised training unit to address both governmental and civil society sectors' needs. A series of recent trainings were conducted in Kazakhstan earlier this year and with the OSCE Presidency anchored there in 2010, we hope we will be called upon to play an ongoing supportive role.

One of the key instruments we have in helping to deal with these challenges is the *Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* – or the Istanbul Protocol. The Istanbul Protocol provides



guidelines on the impartial, independent and prompt investigation and documentation of torture allegations. It is a useful tool not only for medical professionals who examine torture victims, but also for those in the law enforcement, legal and judicial sectors who may encounter torture victims or be asked to weigh forensic evidence in court proceedings.

But training needs go beyond what the Istanbul Protocol alone can provide. Border authorities, those working on asylum cases and in places of detention should all receive appropriate education in what is torture and how to identify its signs, as well as to which governmental, regional and international bodies they can submit documentation of torture.

The IRCT urges all OSCE governments to dedicate resources to ensure that all professionals who may encounter torture victims receive adequate training around these issues. We also request that Member States work to create an environment conducive to health, legal and judicial personnel carrying out their work without undermining their professional and moral independence.

I thank you.