



**Introduction
by the IRCT
Secretary-
General,
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The IRCT is alarmed that the Bush Administration of the United States seems currently to be rather successful in their attempt to undermine the International Criminal Court (ICC). So far, 28 states have signed bilateral immunity agreements with the United States. These agreements require the signatories to send an American national requested by the ICC back to the US instead of surrendering the person to the ICC.

The IRCT is among the large number of international NGOs that have worked hard for the establishment of the ICC – and we consider the ICC a major step toward international justice and a means to bring an end to impunity for the worst crimes known to humanity.

Thanks to the European Union there is still hope for international justice. Guiding principles adopted by the EU member states in September 2002 reject the bilateral immunity agreement, and no EU member state has signed the agreement.

Through the efforts to gain immunity for its own citizens, the United States is threatening international justice, and it opens the door for a dangerous precedence to encourage other states to seek similar immunity agreements for its citizens. Either you have international justice or you do not – selective international justice is no justice at all.

The concerns of the United States that the International Criminal Court will be used to bring politically motivated prosecutions against US nationals are wholly unfounded.

Key Stakeholders in Rehabilitation Movement Agree on Challenges Ahead

The focus for the training at the regional seminars of the IRCT's Regional Strengthening Programme, Phase 2 (RSP2) will be on the development and implementation of working standards in the fields of rehabilitation, documentation, and organisational development, supported by advocacy and prevention activities.

This was the result of the second RSP2 Co-ordination Meeting, titled "Developing and Implementing Working Standards", of the key stakeholders in the Programme. Also the Global Torture Victims Information System (GTIS) was discussed. The GTIS will, for the first time, enable the systematic documentation, monitoring, and reporting of torture incidences at the national, regional, and global level. This important meeting was held at the IRCT premises in Copenhagen on 8-10 May, 2003.

"The fact that we are together here today proves that we are able to stand united as we meet the challenges that have been put in front of us. We are here today, because we are determined to fulfil our mission, which is to promote and support the rehabilitation of torture victims and work for the prevention of torture world-

wide," said IRCT President Maria Piniou-Kalli in her opening address to the participants.

She referred to the war against terror, the many regional conflicts around the world, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These events might easily have divided human rights defenders, including the movement for the rehabilitation of torture victims into opposing political, religious and national factions. She mentioned that it in itself was an achievement that the co-ordination meeting could take place with participants representing every region of the world.

The critical funding situation was among the many problems discussed in the working groups on treatment, documentation, and organisational development. The will to raise money for the fight against torture is decreasing in the EU system, and the same is the case for the will of governments to support the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. Representatives from the rehabilitation centres underlined that the political will to secure sustainable funding for the work with victims of torture is a pre-condition for all other efforts.

The European Union, the Governments of Sweden and

Norway, and the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation support the RSP2, which has achieved the establishment of consensus among some 100 rehabilitation centres on the need for working standards in rehabilitation, documentation, and organisational development. The participants in Copenhagen were the elected representatives from the networks in Asia, Latin America, Sub Sahara Africa, the Middle East and North Africa, and Central & Eastern Europe and New Independent States.

The first phase, RSP1, was implemented in 1999-2001. Building networks and establishing centres for rehabilitation of torture victims is an ongoing process, which is being continued through RSP during 2002-2003.

The development of effective advocacy tools was regarded an important element in meeting the challenges ahead for the implementation of working standards. However, the main challenge still lies in finding solutions to the financial insecurity caused by a shift in donor priorities from rehabilitation of torture victims to prevention of torture and by the insufficient funds available through the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

New IRCT Website

In the first week of June, the IRCT will launch a new website on www.irct.org. It is our hope and ambition that the website will be a useful tool for our partners, donors and the general public. The website is constructed with the aim of being informative and easy to use. There is information about the work of the IRCT, our collaboration partners worldwide, the regional networks, and the IRCT Documentation Centre. A wide range of IRCT press releases and publications are a-

vailable on the website, and in connection with the upcoming campaign on the UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, the new website contains information about events planned to take place around the world on 26 June 2003. It is also possible to download the following IRCT 26 June materials: Press Kits, Campaign Kits, and Essay and Art Competition Kits.

The website further contains the Documentation Centre's databases which include

references to books, reports, journals, articles, and parts of the IRCT picture collection. It is possible to make searches in the database and to order materials from the Documentation Centre.

Finally, the website contains a number of links to related organisations and networks.

The IRCT gratefully acknowledges the financial support from the European Union for the development of the new website.