

Foreword

This issue of Torture is dedicated to the theme of monitoring places of detention with the objective of preventing torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The geographic focus is on the Middle East and North Africa, where efforts to prevent torture through regular inspections of places of detention have been emerging over the past decade.

In the words of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Professor Manfred Nowak, independent monitoring of places of detention is the most effective and sustainable mechanism for preventing torture and gradually developing a prison culture based more on respect for human dignity and human integrity than on fear, exclusion and contempt.

Under the title *Independent Monitoring of Human Rights in Places of Detention in the Middle East and North Africa*, the Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims (RCT), the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT), the National Centre for Human Rights of Jordan and Mizan Law Group for Human Rights hosted a regional seminar in Amman in September 2007.

The regional seminar highlighted how selected states across the region have been able to gain access to prisons and to scrutinize the treatment and conditions of persons deprived of their liberty. By analysing diverse

experiences of existing monitoring systems and practices, the seminar extracted lessons learnt about how to gain access to places of detention, how to conduct inspections and how to bring about sustainable change. The seminar also revealed that there is still a long way to go as not a single state in the region has become a party to the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT), which sets up a global system of independent monitoring of places of detention.

The present issue of Torture, with its focus on the Middle East and North Africa, constitutes the first attempt to capture the experiences and challenges in monitoring of places of detention from a regional perspective. Successive attempts will be made to generate regional platforms for exchanges on how to curb torture in places of detention. The next region to be considered will be Central America and Mexico.

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