Introduction

The IRCT is pleased to have the opportunity to present input and ideas for the new Danish development strategy. The IRCT is a global association of local torture rehabilitation centres, currently supporting approx. 57,000 torture survivors in 75 countries each year. Our input to the strategy is based on hard-earned lessons learned from health-based rehabilitation with individual victims and advocacy against torture using health-based evidence to influence national decision makers and at the UN.

Our work against torture has benefitted from decades of Danish leadership. Denmark has shown both practical and moral leadership by supporting rehabilitation services that help torture survivors across the world to rebuild their lives and contribute to their families and society again. We believe that the new development strategy should place an even stronger focus on this critical issue for Denmark and the world. Below we present two specific areas that we consider key to advancing the promotion of human rights and the fight against torture in the new strategy.

Speak up for human rights

The new strategy should establish enjoyment of human rights as a key development policy objective and enhance its support to organisations whose mandates focus on national and international human rights promotion.

Denmark has a long history of success in global human rights promotion through foreign and development policies and strategies that reinforce each other in this area. This can be seen in Denmark’s crucial role in the creation of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and rehabilitation centres for torture victims around the world. Now, their important work is obstructed by a rapidly shrinking space for promoting human rights. Raising human rights issues with decision makers is becoming increasingly difficult, sometimes dangerous, and the finances available and accessible for human rights work are decreasing to a level where even the strongest organisations have their human rights promotion disrupted by the struggle for economic survival.

To address this, the new strategy should include the following:

- A clear political statement that human rights are essential in open, free and democratic societies and therefore will be promoted as an end goal – which has the added benefit that it also contributes to making development sustainable.
- A focus on generating more financial, technical, and political support to national civil society actors who speak up for human rights. One of the most effective ways Denmark can counter shrinking civil society space is by giving the best possible conditions for national civil society to focus on the substantive human rights issues.
• Support to national and international **organisations who engage and strengthen the work of UN and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms** such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the UN Committee against Torture. These mechanisms have a very positive impact on creating space for civil society to effectively engage with state actors and to make them act against torture. In February 2021, the IRCT will publish an evaluation of our work in this area, which documents their key role.

• Ensure that **development aid is accessible for human rights organisations** and methodologies for monitoring and evaluation take the challenging and often highly political nature of human rights work into account.

**A global anti-torture strategy**

**Denmark should reinforce its global leadership in the fight against torture by developing a thematic strategy on torture. The strategy should establish a clear direction for how Denmark will combine diplomatic engagement with support to civil society actors and the empowerment of torture survivors towards a torture free world.**

Denmark continues its decades long leadership in the fight against torture through the Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI), UN resolutions, providing experts to UN and regional anti-torture bodies, and its strong political and financial support to international and national anti-torture organisations.

This makes an important mark on the world because it protects two of the most fundamental elements of human existence: to be in control of one’s own life and to be protected from physical and psychological violence and assault.

Respecting the sensitivity of the issue, Denmark has mostly led from behind, which has been effective in advancing policy issues. However, this also means that the results have not reached the Danish public, and the larger global discussion about political willingness to end torture has not happened.

The IRCT believes that this is a good moment for Denmark to take a more formal and direct leadership role in the fight against torture by **developing a comprehensive anti-torture strategy**. This would help build a global political momentum for ending the practice and make Denmark’s important contribution to the world more visible. The IRCT and our global membership will be pleased to provide examples of how our rehabilitation and justice work help victims, families and societies recover from torture and move towards a torture free world.

For further questions, please contact: Lisa Henry, IRCT Secretary General, lhe@irct.org