

22 June 2016

PRESS RELEASE

10 years of preventing torture

Wiesbaden – 10 years ago, the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture - the OPCAT - marked the beginning of a human rights success story of the worldwide combat against torture. 81 member states were already committing themselves to establishing independent national institutions (national preventive mechanisms - NPMs) to prevent torture by visiting places of detention; Germany among these as of 2009. To date, 64 states have already established an NPM and contribute to the national and international human rights protection. At the same time, the UN-Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT) was established on an international level and conducted its first visit to Germany in 2013.

Since 2009, the German NPM - the National Agency for the Prevention of Torture - conducts regular visits to places of detention; such as prisons, police detention centers, facilities for detention of persons pending deportation and psychiatric hospitals. The early skepticism of institutions and authorities changed into constructive cooperation. This, as shown in the high number of recommendations implemented, e.g. measures to ensure the right to privacy during video surveillance or the procurement of washable mattresses for police detention centers.

The National Agency is the sole control mechanism in Germany which is able to compare nationwide the different types of institutions in regard to the protection of human dignity. To use this advantage, the National Agency focuses annually on one particular type of institution: facilities for detention of persons pending deportation and repatriation in 2013, juvenile penal institutions in 2014 and youth detention centers in 2015. After the personnel and financial budget increase in 2015, the National Agency was able to increase its visit frequency in regard to psychiatric hospitals, pedagogic-therapeutic units for juveniles as well as to care homes for the elderly. This year, the National Agency's focus is on women in prison. Since its beginning, the National Agency has conducted 282 visits in institutions throughout Germany.

The National Agency for the Prevention of Torture consists of the Federal Agency and the Joint Commission of the States. It has been in office since May 2009, after the Federal Republic of Germany ratified the Optional Protocol to the UN-Anti-Torture-Convention. It shall prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment through regular visits to places of detention. There are approximately 13,000 such places nationwide. To achieve its aim, the National Agency shall control the treatment of persons placed in detention and make recommendations.

Contact: Jennifer Bartelt / Susanne Schuster, Tel.: +49 (611) 1602228-18 / 24, Fax: +49 (611) 1602228-29, E-mail: info@nationale-stelle.de