



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

Preventing Torture and Ill-Treatment: Strengthening Co-operation and Implementation

Vienna, 29-30 June 2026

FINAL REPORT



Executive Summary

The third [Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting \(SHDM III\)](#), held in Vienna on 29 and 30 June 2026, addressed “Preventing Torture and Ill-Treatment: Strengthening Co-operation and Implementation”. Participants discussed measures to strengthen the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, accountability, oversight, access to justice, and redress and rehabilitation for victims and survivors.

The event brought together 274 participants (156 women, 117 men, one undisclosed), including 106 representatives of OSCE participating States and 124 representatives of civil society, as well as 44 participants from OSCE institutions, other international organizations, National Human Rights Institutions and others.

In the opening session, the absolute prohibition of torture was reaffirmed. The interventions underscored the need to ensure the effective implementation of existing legal obligations, international standards and OSCE commitments. Speakers emphasized that prevention requires sustained political commitment, effective institutional safeguards, independent oversight, professional training and accountability, as well as co-operation among State authorities, monitoring mechanisms, civil society and international actors.

The first session examined safeguards and accountability in criminal justice procedures. Introducers emphasized that procedural safeguards should apply from the moment a person is factually deprived of liberty and highlighted the importance of prompt access to legal assistance, notification of relatives, independent medical examinations, effective complaints mechanisms, accurate custody records and audiovisual recording of interviews. The implementation of the Méndez Principles and the use of evidence-based, rapport-based interviewing were also highlighted.

The second session focused on training, monitoring and enhanced oversight. Introducers stressed the importance of practical and continuous training for personnel involved in detention, law enforcement, investigations and prosecutions, alongside independent monitoring of places of deprivation of liberty. The operational and political independence of National Preventive Mechanisms, unrestricted access for oversight bodies and effective follow-up to monitoring recommendations were identified as important elements of prevention.

The third session addressed justice for torture victims, including combating impunity and ensuring redress and rehabilitation. Introducers emphasized the need for prompt, impartial and effective investigations, independent medico-legal examinations, appropriate prosecution and implementation of the Istanbul Protocol. A holistic approach to reparation was highlighted, alongside the meaningful participation of victims and survivors in relevant policies and mechanisms.

Opening Session

Opening remarks:

- *Ambassador Raphael Nägeli, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE, Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council*
- *Maria Telalian, ODIHR Director*

Keynote addresses:

- *Barbara Bernath, Member of the United Nations (UN) Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture*
- *Andrea Huber, Head of International Accountability Platform for Belarus*

The opening remarks reaffirmed that the prohibition of torture is absolute, and that persistent accountability gaps and impunity create conditions for further violations. High-level speakers emphasized the need to translate existing OSCE commitments into practical action, including through the *Swiss Chairpersonship's Roadmap on the Prevention and Eradication of Torture* as a contribution to implementing the Tirana Decision.

The discussions stressed that the prohibition of torture must be upheld not only in law but also in practice, requiring sustained political will, strong institutions, professional training, independent oversight and effective accountability. Torture prevention was framed as a shared institutional responsibility requiring co-operation among States, OSCE institutions, monitoring bodies, civil society, legal professionals and medical experts.

The keynote speakers' preventive-monitoring perspective highlighted the importance of identifying and addressing risks before violations occur, including through independent monitoring of places of detention and effective safeguards from the earliest stages of deprivation of liberty. The importance of co-operation between preventive mechanisms and national authorities was also emphasized.

Finally, speakers underscored that prevention cannot be separated from accountability: allegations of torture and other serious human rights violations must be properly documented, investigated and addressed through effective accountability mechanisms, with access to justice, redress and rehabilitation for victims and survivors.

Session 1: Safeguards and accountability in criminal justice procedures

Introducers:

- *Marie Lequin, Head of Operations, Association for the Prevention of Torture*
- *Mark Fallon, Director of ClubFed, Strategic Advisor at iRecord*
- *Tatiana Chernobil, Lawyer and member of The Coalition of Kazakhstan Against Torture*

Moderator: *Andrew Gardner, Deputy Head, Human Rights Department, ODIHR*

The first session focused on safeguards and accountability at the outset of criminal justice procedures, particularly during arrest, transfer, questioning and police custody, when the risk of torture and ill-treatment is especially high. Introducers recalled the Tirana Ministerial Council Decision and stressed that procedural safeguards should apply as soon as a person is factually deprived of liberty, rather than only after formal recognition as a suspect. These safeguards include access to a lawyer, notification of relatives, information on rights, independent medical examinations, complaints mechanisms, accurate custody records and audiovisual recording.

Introducers highlighted persistent implementation gaps despite existing legal standards, including delays in legal aid, insufficiently trained lawyers and legal grey zones between factual apprehension and formal registration as a suspect. They also stressed the need to adapt safeguards to vulnerable groups.

A recurring theme was the need for more effective implementation of the Méndez Principles as the international framework for effective investigative interviewing. Drawing on operational experience and scientific research, introducers argued that rapport-based interviewing is more effective than coercive interrogation, while torture produces unreliable intelligence, undermines investigations and contributes to poor policy decisions. Courts should exclude evidence obtained through torture or ill-treatment, and the systematic recording of interviews was highlighted as a means of protecting both interviewees and investigators.

Technology was identified as an important safeguard, particularly through electronic custody records, improved injury documentation, audiovisual recording of interviews, and body-worn cameras. At the same time, it was stressed that technology can only contribute effectively to prevention where it is properly designed, implemented and used, with appropriate oversight and accountability. Introducers highlighted examples of reforms across the OSCE region, including strengthened procedural safeguards, improved access to medical care, complaint mechanisms, specialized investigative guidelines, and revised operational procedures.

In parallel, interventions highlighted continuing concerns across the OSCE region, including allegations of torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, excessive use of force, deaths in custody, ineffective investigations, impunity and restrictions on independent monitoring. Survivor testimonies illustrated the lasting consequences of torture and prolonged detention without trial, while highlighting continuing accountability gaps.

Session 2: Preventing torture through training, monitoring, and enhanced oversight

Introducers:

- *Ronald Gramigna, Member of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)*
- *Yadamjav Tselmen, Head of the Mongolian National Preventive Mechanism*
- *Oleg Gushchyn, Legal and International Relations Officer of the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of the Prisoners of War*

Moderator: *Susan Kerr, Head of the Human Rights Department, ODIHR*

The second session focused on the prevention of torture through effective training, independent monitoring and enhanced oversight. As torture and ill-treatment continue to occur, including through the misuse of new technologies, introducers stressed the importance of professional training, institutional culture and independent oversight.

Introducers emphasized that training should extend beyond penitentiary staff to prosecutors, investigators and law enforcement officers. Training should reinforce legal and ethical standards while equipping personnel with practical skills in communication, decision-making and de-escalation through realistic, scenario-based exercises. Introducers also reiterated the importance of training on the Méndez Principles to promote human rights-based investigative interviewing. They further highlighted the need to strengthen the psychological resilience of personnel working in places of detention, particularly in complex situations such as armed conflict. National Preventive Mechanisms established under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) were recognized as playing an important role in delivering such training.

Independent national and international monitoring mechanisms were described as a cornerstone of torture prevention. Introducers stressed that regular, independent monitoring, including unannounced visits to places of detention, strengthens transparency, accountability and public confidence while supporting systemic reform. Cooperation and exchanges of experience between oversight bodies were also highlighted as important for sharing standards, observations and good practices. Recommendations arising from monitoring visits can drive meaningful institutional and cultural reform when effectively implemented.

Introducers emphasized that many of the challenges discussed are structural rather than isolated, requiring institutional and cultural change alongside legal and procedural reforms and sustained cooperation between State authorities, oversight bodies and civil society, supported by effective capacity-building, accountability and international cooperation.

Throughout the session, introducers highlighted the importance of identifying and responding to individual vulnerabilities at an early stage. Preventive safeguards and risk assessments should take account of factors such as sex, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, social status and migration status.

Session 3: Justice for torture victims: Fighting impunity, and ensuring redress and rehabilitation

Introducers:

- *Chris Esdaile, Senior legal advisor, Redress*
- *Maeva Rene-Barry, UN Program Manager, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT)*
- *Kei Kostika Brisku, Director of Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture (ARCT)*

Moderator: *Johannes Heiler, Senior Human Rights Advisor, ODIHR*

This session focused on combating impunity, ensuring accountability and providing effective redress and rehabilitation for victims and survivors of torture and ill-treatment. Introducers stressed that, in the absence of prompt, independent and effective investigation and prosecution, impunity persists and creates significant barriers for victims and survivors seeking justice and protection from further torture and ill-treatment.

Survivors of torture face multiple barriers to justice, fair trial, rehabilitation and reparation. These include gaps in the criminalization of torture, limited avenues for redress, lack of transparency, insufficient protection, and limited access to legal aid, psychological support and other essential services. OSCE participating States should ensure that torture is criminalized in line with the UN Convention against Torture, with penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime. Investigating allegations of torture and ill-treatment requires independent complaints mechanisms, strong institutional safeguards and protection against reprisals. Judicial independence and public trust are essential to ensuring that victims feel safe to report violations and participate in proceedings.

The Istanbul Protocol and the Méndez Principles were highlighted as central frameworks for documenting torture and conducting effective investigations. Independent and accessible medico-legal examinations, reliable documentation of injuries and custody records, and trauma-informed procedures were identified as particularly important. Clear procedures should be available to all professionals involved, including law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, medical professionals, prison administrations, ombuds institutions and social services.

Introducers further stressed that reparation must go beyond compensation. The five forms of reparation (restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition) should be applied together. Rehabilitation should include appropriate long-term physical and psychological support.

Finally, the importance of meaningful participation of victims and survivors was emphasized. People with lived experience should contribute to policymaking, accountability measures, professional training and the development of standards, with safeguards against re-traumatization. Closing the gap between international standards and implementation in practice requires ensuring that survivors' perspectives inform efforts to prevent torture, secure justice and provide meaningful rehabilitation and reparation.

Recommendations

1. Ensure full implementation of the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, in accordance with relevant international human rights treaties and OSCE commitments, including the 2020 Tirana Ministerial Council Decision.
2. Ensure that procedural safeguards apply from the moment of factual deprivation of liberty, including prompt access to a lawyer, notification of relatives, information on rights, independent medical examinations, effective complaints mechanisms and accurate custody records, with appropriate safeguards for persons in vulnerable situations.
3. Strengthen safeguards during arrest, detention and interrogation, including systematic audio-visual recording of interviews and, where appropriate, the use of body-worn cameras and other technologies, while ensuring respect for human rights and data-protection standards.
4. Implement the Méndez Principles and other relevant international standards through legislation, law-enforcement policies and professional training, promoting evidence-based, rapport-based interviewing and ensuring that evidence obtained through torture or ill-treatment is excluded from judicial proceedings.
5. Ensure prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigation and prosecution of allegations of torture and ill-treatment, including through independent complaints and accountability mechanisms, and address persistent impunity and excessive use of force.
6. Strengthen National Preventive Mechanisms and other independent oversight bodies, ensuring their operational and political independence, adequate resources and unrestricted access to all places and stages of deprivation of liberty.
7. Implement recommendations of national and international monitoring mechanisms and strengthen co-operation with relevant international bodies, including the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.
8. Invest in sustained, rights-based training for law-enforcement, detention, investigative and judicial personnel, including training on ethical standards, the Méndez Principles and Nelson Mandela Rules, as well as practical skills in communication, de-escalation and evidence-based interviewing.
9. Promote institutional and cultural change that embeds torture prevention in everyday practice, including by addressing dehumanizing narratives, supporting the psychological resilience of personnel working in places of detention, and maintaining security and effective law enforcement while respecting human dignity.
10. Conduct early and systematic torture-risk assessments, taking into account individual vulnerabilities, including sex, gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, social or migration status and other factors that may increase risks or create barriers to protection.
11. Strengthen independent medical and medico-legal safeguards, including documentation of injuries and deaths in custody and examinations that are accessible and conducted independently of law-enforcement authorities.
12. Ensure effective implementation of the Istanbul Protocol and other relevant standards for documenting and investigating torture, and establish clear procedures for law-enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, medical professionals, prison administrations, ombuds

institutions, social services and civil society to identify risks, document allegations and prevent re-traumatization.

13. Ensure effective, proportionate and survivor-centred redress and rehabilitation, applying the five forms of reparation — restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition — and provide appropriate physical, psychological and other support.
14. Ensure the meaningful participation of victims and survivors in policies, prevention measures, accountability mechanisms, rehabilitation programmes and professional capacity-building.