



**Statement from the Association for the Prevention of Torture
12th Annual Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Forum for NHRIs
Sydney, Australia**

**Delivered by Philippe Tremblay, Asia-Pacific Programme Officer
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Mister Chairman, distinguished participants,

The Association for the Prevention of Torture (www.apt.ch) would like to thank the APF for giving us the opportunity to address representatives of all member institutions on this occasion. As most of you know, the APT provided legal advice to the Advisory Council of Jurists throughout the process which concluded with the adoption of the 2005 reference of torture, and subsequently engaged into a partnership agreement with the APF aimed at helping NHRIs to implement the recommendations included in that reference.

As was mentioned earlier, the APT traveled to Seoul and Bangkok where, together with the NHRIs of Thailand and Korea, we looked into the legal and practical implications of ratifying, respectively, the UN Convention against Torture and its Optional Protocol. In both instances, in addition to facilitating these discussions, which also involved key government officials and civil society organisations, the APT provided training on the methodology of visits to places of detention for the staff of the Korean and Thai NHRIs. In order to increase the impact of these efforts, the APT and the NHRIs worked on the translation of APT's training manual in national languages.

It is worth mentioning that a similar type of joint project was carried out in the Maldives in the course of the year. Although the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives was not formally part of the APF when the reference of torture was debated, the APT felt important to support the efforts of the Maldivian authorities, which ratified the UNCAT in 2004 and the OPCAT two years later, and ultimately strengthened the mandate of its NHRI.

The APT looks forward to the possibility of replicating this exercise with other interested institutions in the coming year, while remaining at the disposal of those NHRIs with which it has co-operated in the last months for additional advice.

Mister Chairman,

In our view, substantial progress has already been made in some countries of the region and, significantly, in countries where the APT has engaged with NHRIs. In Thailand, as you may be aware, the Cabinet has announced the country will accede to the *UN Convention against Torture* very shortly. The Indonesian government is expected to sign the *Optional Protocol* to that same Convention later this week. We understand that internal consultations on that same issue are making headway in the Republic of Korea.

The APT would like to suggest that in the next APF annual meeting, a specific timeslot be allocated to discussion and exchange on the follow-up to the recommendations included in the 2005 reference on torture, a thorough document which provides NHRIs with useful guidance.

Although the APT appreciates that time constraints may make it difficult to hold specific sessions on every theme that has been taken up by the ACJ since its inception, we suggest that the potential the OPCAT offers to NHRIs in terms of raising their profile and enhancing their role at the country level, as well as the giant leaps made by this treaty worldwide since the reference on torture was released — namely the entry into force of the OPCAT, the subsequent creation of the new UN Subcommittee on Prevention, its expected visit to the Maldives in December this year and the increased interest in this treaty in many countries of the Asia-Pacific region — warrant such a stock-taking exercise. Should it be deemed worthwhile, this type of interactive dialogue could eventually serve as a model and be applied to other ACJ references in following years.

In addition to helping NHRIs assess what they have been able to achieve and what remains to be done in the field of torture prevention, looking at best practices from across the region, this discussion would most certainly help us, as a capacity-building institution, identify deficiencies in our approach and areas for improvement in our training programs, something that, we like to think, would ultimately benefit all APF member institutions.

Thank you, Mister Chairman