

Press Release

Council of Europe Press Division

Ref: 226a06

Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 25 60

Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 39 11

pressunit@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press



46 members

Albania
Andorra
Armenia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Belgium
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Croatia
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Georgia
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Latvia
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Malta
Moldova
Monaco
Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
San Marino
Serbia and Montenegro
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom

The Anti-Torture Committee publishes report on Belgium

Strasbourg, 20.04.2006 - The Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) has published today the report on its visit to Belgium in April 2005. The report has been made public at the request of the Belgian authorities.

In its report, the CPT emphasises that the majority of persons met by its delegation did not make allegations of ill-treatment against the police. However, the lack of fundamental safeguards against ill-treatment in police custody is still a cause for concern and the CPT has asked the Belgian authorities to give a high priority to the adoption of relevant legislation (in particular, the right of access to a lawyer). As regards deportation of foreign nationals by air, the CPT welcomes the absolute prohibition of techniques which may cause postural asphyxia.

The CPT's visit to prison establishments took place when a strike by custodial staff had just ended, in particular at Andenne Prison. The CPT observed that, despite the efforts made by the prison management during the strike, the semblance of a decent life could not be guaranteed to prisoners, in spite of recourse to the police and Red Cross and Civil Protection teams. The delegation also examined the circumstances in which two prisoners died during another strike by custodial staff in September 2003, at the same establishment. It has been confirmed that the limits of the prison system are rapidly reached when it is confronted with strike actions by custodial staff, and all the more so when classic negotiation procedures are by-passed and the rules concerning advanced notification of strikes are not respected. The CPT therefore recommended that the Belgian authorities set up a "guaranteed service" in the prison system.

The CPT also carried out a first visit to Namur Prison, where it focused its attention on internees (mental inmates). Their living conditions outside the psychiatric annex are unacceptable. The delegation saw three detainees confined in dark and dilapidated 9 m² cells; one of the detainees slept on a foam mattress on the floor. Such promiscuity has a grave effect on communal living conditions (and could give rise to self-harm or acts of violence against others) and has detrimental consequences for hygiene, not to mention the effects on the psychological state of the internees. The CPT recommended that each detainee be provided with a bed and that 9 m² cells do not contain more than two detainees. Further, in spite of the commitment of the health care staff and the support of the prison management, the health care services provided to some sixty internees were clearly insufficient.

The CPT also made recommendations concerning «De Grubbe» Closed Centre for the temporary placement of minors in Everberg, Jean Titeca Hospital in Schaerbeek, and the Forensic Psychiatric Departments at the Sint-Kamillus University Psychiatric Centre in Bierbeek.

The CPT's visit report is available on the Committee's website: <http://www.cpt.coe.int>

To receive our press releases by e-mail, contact : Council.of.Europe.Press@coe.int

A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.