

Press Release

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Council of Europe Committee of Experts on the United Kingdom

Strasbourg, 08.12.2009 – The Council of Europe's Committee for the prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (CPT) today published the [report](#) on its visit to the United Kingdom in November/December 2008, together with the government's [response](#). These documents have been made public at the request of the United Kingdom authorities.

In England, the CPT's delegation examined the safeguards afforded to persons deprived of their liberty by the police as well as the treatment of inmates and conditions of detention in three local prisons (Manchester, Wandsworth and Woodhill) and a juvenile institution (Huntercombe). In Northern Ireland, it looked at developments as regards policing and in two prisons (Maghaberry and Magilligan). In both parts of the country, the situation of immigration detainees was also examined.

England

As regards policing matters, the CPT's delegation received no allegations of severe ill-treatment by police officers but, in the light of other information available, the Committee has recommended that senior police officers regularly deliver the clear message that the ill-treatment of detained persons is not acceptable. The CPT has also noted the plans to extend the use of electro-shock weapons (tasers) by police forces and expressed concern that the current guidance leaves open the door to misuse of such weapons.

On prison matters, the report expresses concern over the continuing rise in the prison population and the resulting overcrowding. The CPT advocates a more imaginative approach towards reducing prison numbers and advises against the building of very large prisons. The CPT has noted positive developments in the provision of health care in prisons, following the transfer of responsibility to the National Health Service in 2005.

As regards juvenile detention, the report welcomes the increased range of measures and schemes aimed at reducing the high numbers currently in detention and trusts they will be adequately funded. By contrast, it raises concerns over number of incidents of inter-inmate violence, the practice of strip-searching and the decision to continue a policy of restraint involving the use of force as a last resort.

The CPT visited Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre and found both that the conditions and regime in which immigration detainees are held is satisfactory for the average length of stay. It did, however, express concerns over the growing numbers of persons spending longer than a year in immigration detention.

Northern Ireland

The CPT's report notes the extensive changes in policing over the past decade, and highlights the fact that it received no allegations of ill-treatment of persons detained by the Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI). However, it makes reference to the necessity to have strict criteria in place for the use of tasers, which should closely correspond to those governing the use of firearms.

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A political dialogue was initiated in 1949, the Council of Europe was created to promote democracy. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges.

The report states that formal safeguards against ill-treatment appear to operate satisfactorily, but the CPT expresses concern as to the availability of appropriate psychiatric care for persons detained by the police. Concern is also expressed about the practice of holding immigration detainees in police custody suites for up to seven days.

As to prisons, the report recommends that measures be taken to prevent overcrowding becoming a permanent feature of the prison system, and that cells of 7m² should not accommodate more than one prisoner. The report documents several allegations of ill-treatment by members of the Stand-by Search Team (SST) at Maghaberry Prison, and recommends action is taken to ensure the SST does not abuse its powers. Measures are also recommended to reduce prisoner violence in this prison. The report also notes that the prison is not a secure place.

[Link to a summary of the report](#)

[More information on the CPT](#)