(check against delivery)

Good morning. I would like to start by thanking the Committee for presenting a greatly improved draft general comment. I will focus my comments on torture victims right to rehabilitation and documentation of their allegations in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol in the context of article 3. These are based on IRCT’s decades of experience supporting torture victims to rebuild their lives.

I have spent the last two days discussing with rehabilitation experts from all over the world how to best support torture victims in the context of migration.

One of the strong message coming from the meeting is that we need to better understand how torture trauma impacts victims in the context of migration. In particular, we need to understand that torture causes mental health problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, disassociation and avoidance. This makes it extremely difficult for the victim to disclose their ill-treatment, to do so in a chronological and coherent manner, or to do so in a single interview. Torture trauma does not go away by it self and the only way to help victims out of their state of severe pain and suffering is through holistic rehabilitation.

If we want to ensure that torture victims get a fair evaluation of their Article 3 claims, we need to draw consequences from this knowledge.

The first one is to ensure that processes that involve alleged torture victims do not unjustifiably label them as not credible due to their inability to disclose their experiences in a coherent manner.

The second is to ensure that those who allege past acts of torture are offered a forensic medical assessment in accordance with the Istanbul Protocol to determine if these claims can be scientifically verified. Access to this evaluation should not be linked to credibility assessment since we know that torture trauma often result in false negative conclusions on the persons credibility.

The third consequence is that we need to understand that returning persons with torture trauma to places with no rehabilitation places the person in a situation of continued severe pain and suffering with no access to support to overcome this situation. Its important to underscore that this is not a question about differing levels of quality of health care in different countries. It is a question about whether torture victims have access to a legal entitlement designed to alleviate their severe pain and suffering. We therefore strongly support the Committee’s position on this issue.

I thank you for taking the time to hold this consultation.