



**INTER-AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF HUMAN RIGHTS
COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT EDG-A-00-02-00030-00**

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE IN THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM

Executive Summary

This report describes the USAID-funded activities implemented under the project Psychological Support for Victims of Torture in the Inter-American System between October and December 2003.

A brief description of the project's annual goals is followed by a detailed presentation of the activities implemented under each of its components. These components are: comprehensive psychological support for victims of torture or their relatives; training and support for CEJIL staff; litigating torture cases in the Inter-American System; systematization of the methodology for providing comprehensive psychological support; sensitization of the Inter-American System; dissemination of information about the project; and updating of the directory of organizations.

The final section contains an analysis of the main lessons learned in implementing the project during the quarter under review.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE IN THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM

1. General Framework

During the reporting period (October-December 2003), the IHR devoted much of its efforts to designing the specialized section on the project for its website, and making it available online. This work was not contemplated originally in the annual work plan for 2003. The idea of creating and operating this Web page arose out of the strategy for follow-up drawn up at the meeting of the team-network of specialists held in August 2003.

Under the 2003 annual plan, CEJIL was assigned responsibility for producing the Thematic Files and the Gaceta. The staff of the institution involved in the project discussed the format and content of these outputs in depth, and eventually agreed on outlines for them. They are now in the process of being produced.

As part of the coordination activities between the IHR and CEJIL, advantage was taken of the presence of both project coordinators at the hearings of the Inter-American Commission in Washington (in October) to hold informal talks about the project. These face-to-face meetings are extremely useful for optimizing the administration and management of a project with such singular characteristics as this one.

All the members of the team-network of specialists were incorporated into the project between January and June 2003. Between October and December, the members of the team-network kept in touch via the electronic discussion list, and the results of the meeting held in August were systematized.

2. Annual Goals

- To set up of a team-network of professionals specializing in comprehensive psychological support for victims of torture with cases before the bodies of the Inter-American System
- To design a methodology for providing comprehensive psychological support to victims of torture whose cases are being considered by the protection bodies of the Inter-American System
- To impact the development of the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Human Rights Court and the recommendations of the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, with regard to psychosocial reparations in torture cases.

3. Implementation of the Project

3.1. Comprehensive Psychological Support for Victims of Torture or Their Relatives

3.1.1 Description

In October 2003, psychological support was provided to Wagner dos Santos, the petitioner in a case involving the Government of Brazil. The Inter-American Commission held a hearing on October 14th. Wagner dos Santos is a victim, survivor and witness of the Candelaria Massacre, which took place July 23rd 1993, and involved street children and youths.

Brazilian psychologist Andrea Chiesorin was assigned to provide psychological support to Wagner dos Santos. Intensive support was provided October 12th -15th, during the hearings of the Inter-American Commission. The 58.5 hours of work involved included psychological support for Wagner (and the preparation of his testimony before the Commission), the preparation of expert testimony, the drafting of

the report and diagnosis, and coordination with the legal team (attorneys Liliana Tojo and Viviana Krsticevic), to provide input for the legal strategy and the presentation of the case before the Commission. A total of 35 hours were spent working directly with the victim (Wagner dos Santos).

Although psychologist Andrea Chiesorin is not a member of the project's team-network of specialists, she was chosen on account of highly unusual circumstances related to the victim. This case spent years in the Brazilian courts, and during that time Wagner dos Santos was in contact with this particular psychologist. Due to the violence to which he has been subjected, the victim is wary of people and finds it hard to establish relationships. It was therefore felt important to maintain the continuity of the psychological support. Ms. Chiesorin was, of course, also able to communicate with Wagner in his native language (Portuguese).

3.1.2 Method

Once the psychologist had been chosen, the project staff emailed her documents containing information about the approach to the psychological support being provided under this project. Ana Deutsch, a member of the team-network of specialists, was chosen to advise and supervise Ms. Chiesorin, to ensure that the work was carried out using the approach proposed by the project.

The process of support consisted of:

- Counseling, to help the victims cope with the painful process of reliving traumatic events.
- Preparing and reconstructing the testimony.
- Making the victim aware of the importance of the case being presented before the system and preparing for the hearing.
- Preparing expert testimony on the victim's emotional state, and the physical and psychic symptoms and signs of the traumatic event, and a summary of the consequences and harm the victim has suffered over the years.
- Coordinating with the legal team in charge of fighting the case.

Ms. Chiesorin then wrote up a psychological evaluation and presented a report to the IIHR on every phase of the work carried out.

During her stay in Washington Ms. Chiesorin held meetings with the legal team in charge of the case and, on October 15th 2003, with Gilda Pacheco, coordinator of the project for the IIHR, to exchange information about the project as a whole and Wagner's case in particular.

In coordination with CEJIL, the IIHR handled the logistics of the expert's involvement in the hearings in Washington (food, accommodation, processing of per diem allowance, contract and payment of professional fees to Andrea Chiesorin).

3.1.3 Background / Rationale

The goal for 2003 with regard to psychological support was to provide support in three torture cases being considered by the Inter-American System. The two cases before the Court were included in February and March, but a case for the Commission remained pending. This was achieved when a hearing was granted to Wagner dos Santos, the petitioner in the case involving the Government of Brazil.

During the preliminary phase of the project, the involvement of psychology professionals in the Inter-American System has consisted of the drafting of psychological reports for presentation as evidence (expert testimony or documentary evidence), when the Court is preparing a judgment ordering

reparations. Psychological support for the victims of torture has not been a formal component of the litigation process.

Therefore, the aim with the three cases included under the project during 2003 was to initiate a comprehensive process of preparing expert evidence and providing psychological support for victims of torture-related human rights violations. It was decided that 50 hours of psychological support would be provided in each case, including counseling for the victims, the preparation of their testimony and coordination with the legal team, as well as the writing up of expert assessments and reports.

3.1.4 Institution(s) responsible and coordination

The IHHR and CEJIL teams of specialists selected the professionals who provided the psychological support.

3.1.5 Intermediate steps

- Two specialists (expert and advisor from the team-network) assigned to the Wagner dos Santos case before the Inter-American Commission.
- The verbal expert evidence was prepared and presented.

3.1.6 Results or Outputs

- Victim of torture assisted by the project.
- Verbal expert evidence presented by specialist to the Commission during the hearing.
- Session of the Commission devoted to a case linked with the project.

3.1.7 Impact indicators

“Improvement in the quality of the psychological support provided to victims of torture with hearings before the bodies of the Inter-American System”

“Victims are more aware of the importance of their case being brought before the Inter-American System”

“More and better documentation about practices for supporting victims of torture”

“Judgments deal with the question of psychosocial reparations in greater depth”

The objective of this activity is to enhance the theoretical, technical and logistical capabilities for providing comprehensive psychological support to victims of torture. Qualitative and quantitative progress was made in the time that elapsed between the first cases considered by the Court included in the project (February-March 2003) and the case presented to the Commission (Wagner dos Santos). This was reflected in the number of hours devoted to the cases (a total of 58 hours in the Wagner dos Santos case, while only fifteen hours were devoted to each of the first two, before the Court). The comprehensive psychological support provided to the victims was enhanced over the course of the year, as can be seen in the reports of the specialist professionals.

Devoting more time to the case makes it possible to prepare the victims better for their involvement in the hearings and make them more aware of the importance of their case being brought before the system. It also permits the experts involved to document the case better and make a more complete report (both as regards the expert psychological evidence presented to the protection bodies, and to provide input for the collection of documents being built up by the project).

It is not possible to evaluate the indicator “*Judgments deal with the question of psychosocial reparations in greater depth,*” as the Commission has not yet issued a report in the Wagner case. Once the ICHR has completed this process, it will be possible to evaluate the indicator. This indicator depends on a combination of several activities (e.g., litigating of cases and sensitization of the Inter-American System).

The means of verification are as follows:

- Report on psychological support prepared by Andrea Chiesorin with advice from Ana Deutsch.
- Emails (coordination between Andrea Chiesorin and Ana Deutsch).

3.2. Training and support for CEJIL staff

3.2.1 Description

During the quarter under review (October-December 2003), considerable progress was made with the activities related to the objective of ensuring that “CEJIL staff receive professional training in the handling of cases that involve victims of torture.”

To this end, and in accordance with the work plan for the period, several activities were carried out. They are described below.

Three training workshops were held with the staff of the organization. The first took place October 19th 2003, taking advantage of the fact that a large number of CEJIL staff members were in Washington for the hearings of the Inter-American Commission.

Alicia Neuburger was hired to coordinate the activity. The people who took part were: Viviana Krsticevic, Roxanna Altholz, Sean O’Brien, María Clara Galvis, Tara Melish, Juan Carlos Gutiérrez, Soraya Long, Francisco Quintana, Alejandra Nuño, Gisella de León, Andrea Pochak, Nicholas Galleti and Jacqueline Nolley.

Two other workshops were held, at the offices in Costa Rica and Washington.

The workshop in Costa Rica took place November 10th -11th 2003 at CEJIL’s offices in San José. The schedule for both days was 9 am - 12 pm, and 2 pm – 6 pm. On the first day, the morning session was given over to a meeting of the staff of legal professionals (Juan Carlos Gutiérrez, Soraya Long, Alejandra Nuño, Francisco Quintana and Oswaldo Ruiz). In the afternoon, Ms. Deutsch led an activity with the rest of the staff (Lena Chávez, Susana García and Edilma Granados). On the second day, the morning was again used to work with the staff of legal professionals, while the entire team came together for the afternoon session.

The workshop in Washington took place December 1st- 2nd. The participants were legal professionals Viviana Krsticevic, Roxanna Altholz, Sean O’Brien, María Clara Galvis, Gisella de León and Tara Melish. During the morning sessions, they were joined by Jacqueline Nolley and Nicholas Galleti, members of staff who are not attorneys.

In addition to these activities, during the meeting of the staff held parallel to the sessions of the Inter-American Commission (on October 13th), details were given of the psychological support to be provided under the project. Information about this service was also disseminated on CEJIL’s internal email list, encouraging the staff to use it.

3.3.2 Method

As mentioned in the July-September report, following the meeting of the team-network of specialists (held in August, in San José, Costa Rica) and subsequent discussions, CEJIL decided that an ongoing process of internal training was needed rather than a single group of activities. The organization therefore asked Ana Deustch -a member of the team-network of specialists- to help it formulate a methodology.

There was also follow-up by phone with each office, to reinforce the dissemination of the materials distributed at the event, and to ensure that every member of staff had seen and begun to acquire a working knowledge of them, to establish a minimum frame of reference for further work.

During the first workshop (Washington, October 19th), the staff was able to discuss the most urgent, critical issues in relation to their particular area of work: close, prolonged contact with human suffering and pain, the strong external demand and the specific situation in which the work is carried out. All this gives rise to feelings and reactions, both as individuals and members of a group, which are amplified by the individual “baggage” of each staff member (gender, cultural background, life history, etc.).

As planned, and taking advantage of the fact that over 80% of the staff were present, the professional in charge listened to and noted their comments, in order to suggest how the psychological support work could be improved and the needs better met.

Building on the results of the first workshop, the other two focused on the specifics of the project. Although both were originally intended to be more of a general nature -and the expert in charge of both was Ana Deutsch-, certain changes had to be made to meet the specific needs of each group. To ensure that the staff could focus all their attention on the activity, they were excused from their regular duties.

Continuing the process begun at the activity in October, both workshops addressed the following topics:

- Concept of trauma: psychological consequences, diagnosing post-traumatic stress syndrome, torture and post-traumatic stress syndrome.
- Other forms of violence and their physical and psychological impact: prison, sexual violence, deportation, massacres, genocide.
- Psychological effects on individuals, families and the communities, and how they affect specific social and cultural groups.
- Meeting with victims: gathering of data and facts, relationship with them before and after the meeting. Expectations, anxieties.
- The process of seeking justice and its therapeutic potential.
- Aspects of counter-transference in work with victims.
- Secondary trauma and self-care.

3.2.3 Background / Rationale

The aim of this activity was for the CEJIL team to be better prepared to handle difficult emotional situations with the victims and their relatives, and for the organization as a whole to be more aware of the psychological impact of torture on the victims. CEJIL handles 90% of the cases in the System, so the victims of torture will be the ones to benefit most.

3.2.4 Institution(s) responsible and coordination

CEJIL's team of specialists, in consultation with the IHR, selects the professionals who carry out the staff training.

3.2.5 Intermediate steps

- The experts were selected to provide the training.
- The topics to be covered were planned, and coordinated with the experts.
- Invitations were issued to the staff of CEJIL.

3.2.6 Results or Outputs

- 19 CEJIL staff members (legal professionals and other members of the team) received training.
- Systematization and dissemination (via electronic media) of the characteristics of the psychological support available for victims of torture.
- Three reports on the training workshops.

3.2.6 Impact indicators

“CEJIL team better equipped to deal with psychological aspects of cases of torture”

“The bodies of the Inter-American System give greater consideration to the issue”

With the training under way, the CEJIL team is beginning to enhance its expertise for handling situations related to torture cases, and identify the dynamics of continuous work with victims of serious human rights violations. The key areas in which the staff requires support and training are also being identified, and this information is being used as input for planning the training for next year.

The training for CEJIL, which started this quarter (October-December 2003), will ensure that torture-related issues will have a higher profile in the Inter-American System, and that the dimensions and repercussions are better understood, since CEJIL, the organization most involved in litigating cases, is more aware of the issue, and better equipped to deal with it.

The means of verification are as follows:

- Emails inviting participants to the workshops.
- Programs of the workshops.
- Reports of the specialists who provided the training.

3.3. Litigating torture cases in the Inter-American System

3.3.1 Description

Preparation of cases

As called for in the work plan for 2003, and as part of the efforts to bring new cases involving torture into the Inter-American System, attorney Roxanna Altholz carried out a mission to Colombia in November, with a view to preparing cases that could be included in the project. Specifically, she sought to make headway in documenting two cases that could prove to be very paradigmatic: the Mapiripán massacre and the Wilson Gutiérrez Soler cases. The Inter-American Commission is considering both and the

process is at an advanced stage, so the work is focusing on what will be needed when they reach the Court.

Ms. Altholz had a two-hour meeting Monday, November 17th 2003 with Rafael Barrios, of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective, the organization handling this case with CEJIL. The meeting took place at the Hotel Suite Jones and the purpose was to ascertain the current status of the criminal investigations regarding both the instigators and perpetrators of the Mapiripán massacre. They also discussed the Gutiérrez family's security.

On the morning of Wednesday, November 19th, another two-hour meeting took place at the Collective's offices. On this occasion the meeting was with Ricardo Gutiérrez, his wife, and attorney Rafael Barrios. The main objectives were twofold: (1) to explain to them the procedure followed by the Court, the mechanics of the hearings, and the possibility of giving testimony (as the case may reach the Court in 2004); and, (2) to better understand the security situation of the Gutiérrez family and consider what steps could be taken to improve it. Ms. Altholz also discussed with Mr. Gutiérrez his family's need for, and readiness to receive, psychological treatment and support before and during the public hearing of the Court in 2004 or 2005. She also presented information about the project.

Another meeting held at the Collective's offices the same day involved Rafael Barrios, Reinaldo Villalba, Eduardo Cárdenas, Jomary Ortégón and Soraya Gutiérrez, of the *Jose Alvear Restrepo* Lawyers' Collective. This three-hour meeting was very important because Ms. Altholz discussed the litigating of the Mapiripán massacre and Gutiérrez cases before the Inter-American Court with all the Collective's attorneys. She gave information about the project, to assess the possibility of these two cases being included in it.

On November 20th 2003, a meeting was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss the precautionary measures for the Gutiérrez family. Taking part were representatives of the Ministers of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Defense, and others from the Public Prosecutor's Office, the Police, and the Attorney General's Office. The meeting lasted an hour and agreement was reached on certain measures for improving the Gutiérrez family's security.

Hearings

During the reporting period, a hearing was held to consider the case of *Wagner dos Santos vs. Brazil*, during the 118th Regular Sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (ICHR).

The hearing was scheduled for October 14th 2003, in the meeting room of the ICHR, in Washington D.C., USA. Wagner dos Santos (the victim in the case), psychologist Andrea Chiesorin, attorney Liliana Tojo (the CEJIL staff member in charge of litigating this case) and attorney Viviana Krsticevic all traveled to Washington.

The attorneys, the victim and the psychologist held meetings on October 11th and 12th 2003.

3.3.2. Method

Attorney Roxanna Altholz conducted a mission to Colombia during November 2003. She met with the co-petitioners to discuss procedural and evidentiary matters, and to present information about the possible inclusion of the cases in the project (the travel report is attached, detailing the activities carried out during the mission).

The goal set for the first year of the project was the presentation of three representative cases of torture in the hemisphere. Accordingly, and as explained in the July-September 2003 report, hearings were requested for the session of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights scheduled for October.

During the hearing (Washington, October 14th 2003) of the *Wagner dos Santos vs. Brazil* case –one of those requested that had potential for being included in the project-, psychologist Andrea Chiesorin accompanied and assisted Mr. Dos Santos, and wrote up a report giving her expert opinion regarding the harm that the victim had suffered as result of the rights violations. She was advised by psychologist Ana Deutsch, a member of the project's team-network.

The October 11th -12th meetings involving the attorneys, the victim and the psychologist were used to explain the mechanics of the hearing to Mr. Dos Santos, and the scenario he could expect to be confronted with on October 14th.

The President of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, José Zalaquett, Commissioner Julio Prado Vallejo, and staff attorneys of the protection body took part in the hearing. The State of Brazil was represented by members of its mission to the OAS, and officials from Itamaraty and the Special Human Rights Secretariat of the President's Office.

During the course of the hearing, Mr. Dos Santos was questioned about the alleged facts in the case, and his present situation (a summary of the case is attached).

Ms. Chiesorin was then questioned, so she could present the Commission with information about the extent of the harm done to Mr. Dos Santos, considering the specifics of the case: he was a street child, the survivor of a massacre, had been tortured and exiled, had permanent physical scars, and had witnessed the execution of his companions.

3.3.3 Background / Rationale

Presenting details of the impact of torture on the victims to the protection bodies of the Inter-American System will make them more aware of the complex nature of the problem, and encourage them to develop adequate solutions. The aim is for CEJIL to litigate these cases, supported by the new comprehensive approach promoted by the IHR, and thereby improve the Commission's recommendations on torture and the Court's jurisprudence on the subject.

3.3.4 Institution(s) responsible and coordination

CEJIL's team of specialists.

3.3.5 Intermediate steps

- A hearing before the Commission was requested and prepared.
- The psychology experts were assigned and their activities coordinated.
- Psychology experts and CEJIL attorneys took part in the ICHR hearing.

3.3.6 Results or outputs

- ICHR hearing on Wagner dos Santos case.
- Summary of the Wagner dos Santos case.
- Written expert opinion of Andrea Chiesorin regarding the harm done to the victim (Mr. Dos Santos) by the rights violations.
- Report on attorney Roxanna Altholz's mission to Colombia (November 2003).

3.3.7 Impact indicators

“Increase in the number of cases of torture considered by the bodies of the Inter-American System”

With the inclusion of Wagner dos Santos vs. Brazil, the project achieved its goal of three cases presented during 2003. Thanks to CEJIL's efforts, substantial progress was made in increasing the number of cases of torture processed by the system's protection bodies. The overall goal of the project is 17 cases in three years. This would be a major increase, as in the last 20 years the Court has only judged 18 cases in which torture was involved. The steps taken to identify new cases that could be brought before the Court ensures that the project will also achieve the number of cases set as the goal for the next two years.

The means of verification are as follows:

- Press release issued by the Inter-American Commission with respect to the activities that took place during the 118th regular period of sessions, including details of the hearing granted for the case of Wagner dos Santos vs. Brazil.
- Psychological evaluation of Wagner dos Santos by expert Andrea Chiesorin.

3.4. Systematization of the methodology for providing comprehensive psychological support

3.4.1 Description

The team-network of specialists met August 2nd-4th in San José to determine the strategic lines of action for implementing the comprehensive support for victims of torture whose cases are considered by the protection bodies, and to consolidate the team-network itself.

The IIHR subsequently systematized the results of the meeting and made a final determination regarding the outputs. It drafted guidelines for preparing and presenting reports and expert assessments, as well as a document systematizing the recommendations and contributions of the team-network. These documents were posted on the specialized section of the website.

The Institute also decided that the best way of consolidating the methodology for providing comprehensive support to torture victims, and the work of the team-network, would be to do so electronically, as it would be difficult to get the team together again in the near future.

The main strategy for providing follow-up to the development, implementation and enhancement of the comprehensive psychological support methodology entailed the design of a specialized section of the IIHR's website. This contains the following links:

- **Team-network.** Presents information about the members of the team-network and the documents posted on the team's electronic discussion forum.
- **Documents.** Contains guidelines for reports on psychological support and expert psychological evidence, as well as assessments and reports related to the project. It also contains the full text of the Istanbul Protocol.
- **Digital library.** Provides information about thematic articles, international jurisprudence, and instruments on torture adopted by the Universal and Inter-American Systems, and access to the IIHR's Documentation Center and specialized collection on torture.
- **Glossary.** Presents definitions of psychological and legal terms often used under the project.
- **Directory.** Contains a database of organizations involved in the psychosocial treatment of the effects of torture in Latin America.

- **Other sites.** Offers links and descriptions of websites specializing in torture, and its prevention and treatment.
- Bulletins on the progress of the project are also posted on the main page.

A message was sent to all the members of the electronic discussion list announcing the launching of the specialized section of the website on December 10th. Access is limited to members of the team-network of experts and the IIHR and CEJIL specialists in charge of the project, as the primary objective during this first phase is to consolidate the construction of the methodology for treating victims of torture. There are also documents whose use is optional, such as reports on the psychological support provided and transcriptions of hearings of the protection bodies. A password is needed to access this section (which was only issued to members of the team-network's restricted-access discussion list). The plan is to eventually make it available to all interested parties.

In September 2003, the IIHR launched -and now moderates- an electronic discussion list to enable members of the team to present and discuss their ideas. The team-network uses this forum to communicate and exchange information, and to receive information about the content of the specialized section and comment on it.

3.4.2 Method

Constructing the specialized section involved compiling, selecting and editing the information, and making it compatible with the format of the Web page.

For the glossary section, 80 psychological terms were selected that were discussed at the meeting of the team-network in August 2003; and the definitions were drafted with a psychosocial perspective, after studying and selecting bibliographical material. The section presently contains 19 terms; the other 61 are in the process of being prepared.

The IIHR's Documentation Center was also assigned the task of designing and elaborating a specialized virtual collection (accessible electronically) called "Torture, damages and reparations," which contains 467 catalog entries related to the materials contributed by members of the team-network, and another bibliography compiled under the project.

The IIHR has a special program that generates statistics on the specialized sections (a list of the hits they receive, the names of the organizations concerned, countries, the resources accessed most often, days on which there are most hits). This program will be used to monitor the number and types of hits that the project's specialized section receives.

3.4.3 Background / Rationale

The ultimate goal of the project is "To provide psychological support to victims of torture with cases in the Inter-American Human Rights Protection System." After studying the matter, the IIHR decided that a comprehensive methodology was needed to attain this goal, both to improve the support for the victims and to influence the protection bodies of the Inter-American System, sensitizing them to the issues involved and influencing the development of jurisprudence.

To this end, a team-network was set up, comprising specialists from all parts of the hemisphere. They met in August to help construct the methodology. The IIHR systematized their inputs between October and December 2003, and made them available to the team by posting them on the specialized section designed to enable the experts to consolidate and continue to provide input for the methodology.

3.4.4 Institution(s) responsible and coordination

The IIHR is responsible for systematizing the methodology for providing comprehensive psychological support to victims of torture developed by the team-network, and then disseminating it among the members.

3.4.5 Intermediate steps

- The IIHR read the recommendations of the team-network and prepared a summary.
- The Institute communicated with the team-network via the discussion list.
- The specialized section of the website was designed and constructed.
- IIHR staff searched for, edited and formatted the material for the specialized section.

3.4.6 Results or Outputs

- Electronic discussion list in operation.
- Special section called “Team-network of the project Psychological support for victims of torture in the Inter-American System.”
- Three documents systematizing the results of the meeting of the team-network.

3.4.7 Impact indicators

“Enhanced approach to comprehensive psychological support for victims of torture in the Inter-American System”

“More and better instruments for systematizing these experiences”

“More experiences being shared regarding improved comprehensive psychological support for victims of torture”

Designing the methodology for providing comprehensive psychological support has improved the theoretical and technical capabilities for dealing with torture cases in the Inter-American System. The specialized section of the IIHR’s website contains information about instruments for enhancing and honing the professional skills needed to deal with cases of this kind, which translates into better support and direct benefits for the victims.

The means of verification are as follows:

- Electronic address and password for the specialized section.
- Electronic addresses that form part of the discussion list of the team-network.
- Hits that the specialized section receives.

3.5. Sensitization of the Inter-American System

3.5.1 Description

During the 118th regular period of sessions of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), IIHR staff members met with representatives of the protection body to sensitize them to the objectives of the project.

On the morning of Tuesday, October 21st 2003, IIHR Executive Director Roberto Cuéllar and IIHR project officer Gilda Pacheco presented the Second Report on Human Rights Education to the ICHR, at the Commission's headquarters in Washington. They took advantage of the opportunity to present information about priority projects that the Institute wishes to coordinate with the Commission, including "Psychological Support for Victims of Torture in the Inter-American System." After hearing a short description of the project, the ICHR asked its Vice President Susana Villarán to hold another meeting, to discuss the project in greater depth. The second meeting took place the same day and involved attorney Elizabeth Abi-Mershed, Commissioner Susana Villarán, CEJIL project officer Viviana Krsticevic, and Gilda Pacheco.

3.5.2 Method

The meeting began with the two project officers explaining the reasons for launching the initiative and the different components of the project. They also gave details of the differentiated, but complementary, work of the IIHR and CEJIL. The IIHR presented a document containing a brief summary of the project and the main areas in which progress had been made. Other points discussed included the objectives and dynamics of the project and the work planned for next year.

Both Commissioner Susana Villarán and attorney Elizabeth Abi-Mershed said that the project was very important and asked to be included in the IIHR's mailing list for the team-network. They also requested access to the specialized section of the website on the project, so they could systematically monitor the headway being made. Commissioner Villarán thought that a hearing could be held in March 2004, during the ICHR's regular period of sessions, to allow the project staff to present the project in greater detail.

3.5.3 Background / Rationale

During 2003 further efforts were made to sensitize judges and commissioners to the need to grant hearings to the cases promoted by the project; the particular psychological and social problems faced by victims of torture; and the need to order comprehensive psychological and social reparations.

The ICHR's procedures do not include thematic hearings for the presentation of projects. Therefore, the meeting with Commissioner Susana Villarán and attorney Elizabeth Abi-Mershed took the place of the thematic hearing originally requested and included in the work plan for 2003. The Commission was keen to find an alternative way of obtaining information about the project; hence the meeting with Commissioner Villarán.

3.5.4 Institution(s) responsible and coordination

IIHR and CEJIL teams of specialists

3.5.5 Intermediate steps

- The teams coordinated and met with representatives of the Inter-American Commission.

3.5.6 Results or Outputs

- Representatives of the Commission briefed about the project, its objectives, progress and future goals

3.5.7 Impact indicators

“Progress in the jurisprudence on torture of the Inter-American Commission and Court”

“Progress in sensitizing these bodies to the psychological impact of torture”

“Incorporation of psychosocial reparations for the victims or their relatives into the recommendations and judgments of the bodies of the Inter-American System”

The meeting with the ICHR marked an important step in the process of informing and sensitizing its members about the project’s objectives and the importance of granting hearings for torture cases. Commissioner Susana Villarán and attorney Abi-Mershed were asked to monitor the project. This is strengthening the channels of communication with the protection body and will permit the sensitization process to continue next year.

It is still too early to tell whether this process of informing and sensitizing the Commission will impact its reports and recommendations regarding psychosocial for reparations victims and their relatives, since no such reports have yet been issued. However, the Commission’s desire to learn as much as possible about the project is a very positive sign.

The means of verification are as follows:

- Status report on the project
- Agenda of meeting with the members of the Commission
- Agenda of meeting with Commissioner Susana Villarán and attorney Abi-Mershed

3.6 Dissemination of information about the Project

3.6.1 Description

As part of the efforts to provide access to information about torture and its psychological impact on the victims, the IIHR organized two dissemination activities during this quarter (October-December 2003).

On November 5th 2003, a class was held at IIHR Headquarters for law and psychology students from the University of Costa Rica. The aim was to present the approach being promoted by the project (coordination between psychology and law professionals). Thirty students from the two faculties took part. The professors in charge were Alicia Neuburger, (psychologist) and Víctor Rodríguez (attorney), both of whom are working with the IIHR team of specialists for this project.

On November 18th 2003, at the initiative of the project’s team of specialists, a dialogue was held at IIHR Headquarters with Peruvian psychologist Victoria Pareja, a member of the Psychosocial Treatment Center (CAPS). This is a counterpart organization of the project in Peru, and team-network member Pilar Raffo works for it.

The discussion centered on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that recently presented its report in Peru. Advantage was taken of the opportunity to inform Ms. Pareja about the project and explain how some of its core theoretical and practical elements could be applied in the debate in Peru (e.g., psychological support for victims during public hearings in cases involving human rights violations). A total of 15 people took part, all either academics or engaged in human rights work. A summary of the activity will be disseminated via the electronic discussion list and posted on the project’s specialized section.

The other activities related to this component programmed in the plan for 2003 (CEJIL's Thematic Files and specialized Gaceta, and the IIHR's self-teaching course) are being prepared and will be launched in 2004, as explained in the January-June report and the annual plan for 2004.

3.6.2 Method

Both activities were implemented at the IIHR's initiative, coordinating directly with the participants. The invitations to the meeting were issued by phone and email, and minutes were taken at both events.

3.6.3 Background / Rationale

The aim is to offer up-to-date information on the legal headway being made in the fight against torture, both in the Inter-American System and in other international bodies, and to disseminate information about the major issues involved in torture, its psychosocial implications and possible types of reparations. If the project becomes more widely known, other people who use the system will be able to replicate the experience and the project's outputs will be known to more victims, their attorneys and organizations that offer psychosocial support.

3.6.4 Institution(s) responsible and coordination

The IIHR implemented two separate activities to disseminate the project (the joint class and the dialogue). The IIHR is preparing the materials for the self-teaching course, and CEJIL the Thematic Files and specialized Gaceta.

3.6.5 Intermediate steps

- The IIHR coordinated and issued invitations to the joint class and dialogue, and handled the logistics.

3.6.6 Results or outputs

- 45 people received information directly about the project "Psychological support for victims of torture in the Inter-American System."

3.6.7 Impact indicators

"More people are knowledgeable about the psychological impact of torture and methods for assisting the victims"

The launching of CEJIL's Thematic Files and specialized Gaceta, and the IIHR's self-teaching course, will transmit information about the project to countless people all over the world who have access to the Internet. The work of preparing these outputs got under way in 2003, with the drafting of the first concept papers. Dissemination activities were also held, reaching a smaller audience but in a direct way.

The means of verification are as follows:

- Written proceedings of the joint class for law and psychology students.
- Transcription of the discussions that took place at the dialogue with Victoria Pareja.
- List of people who took part in the dialogue with Victoria Pareja.

3.7 Updating of the Directory of Organizations

3.7.1 Description

The regional directory contains details of organizations that specialize in psychosocial treatment for torture survivors, and their relatives. It was created originally using File Maker Pro software, but following the design of the project's specialized section on the IIHR's website, it was converted to a Web-page format, designed by the IIHR to make it available online.

3.7.2 Method

The information available in the File Maker Pro program was transferred to a specialized database to provide access via the Internet. The organizations linked directly to the project were included first, and other NGOs will gradually be added, drawing on information contained in electronic files, printed documents or the previous database.

3.7.3 Background / Rationale

The process of compiling information about NGOs that provide psychosocial support to victims of torture in the hemisphere got under way in 2002. A specialized database was created during the first months of 2003, using the File Maker Pro software. The staff began keying in information about the organizations to which the members of the team-network belong, and other organizations in different countries were contacted with a view to including them in the directory. It was then decided that it would be better to transfer the information to an electronic database that is part of the IIHR's technological platform, to make it available online.

The directory can be shown to judges responsible for ordering reparations, to demonstrate the existence of local organizations and resources that could help victims and their relatives recover from the emotional trauma they have suffered.

3.7.4 Institution(s) responsible and coordination

IIHR's team of specialists

3.7.5 Intermediate steps

- The electronic directory was created.
- Electronic and personal contacts were made with organizations.
- Information was keyed into the electronic directory.

3.7.6 Results or Outputs

- Electronic directory of organizations specializing in treatment for victims of torture, including entries for eight organizations involved in the project

3.7.7 Impact indicators

“Users have more access to up-to-date information about organizations”

The creation of the electronic directory means that users have access to more up-to-date information about organizations working in the field of torture.

The means of verification are as follows:

- Electronic access to directory of organizations

4. Lessons Learned

Under the project, progress is gradually being made toward the goal of influencing the jurisprudence of the Inter-American System. The original idea was to help victims with their psychological problems, but the project staff then realized how important it was to sensitize the judges and commissioners to the emotional, symbolic and social repercussions of being involved in a case brought before the system; and the need to issue comprehensive judgments that can compensate the victims, their families and society for the harm done.

After implementing the activities in 2003, the IIHR and CEJIL teams of specialists responsible for the project realized that achieving the strategic goals set called for close coordination of the psychological and legal work involved in the process of providing psychological support, giving expert testimony and litigating cases.

We believe that is where the project’s potential lies: in influencing the jurisprudence of the Inter-American System and, thereby, the implementation of public policies that guarantee respect for human rights and comprehensive reparations for victims in countries whose cases benefit from the project.

Another lesson learned during 2003 was the importance of the emblematic cases presented before the Inter-American System. In the Wagner dos Santos case, only one person received psychological support (Mr. Dos Santos himself). But the case had a big impact, because, following his testimony before the Inter-American Commission, the Brazilian government agreed to meet the costs of the surgery that Mr. Dos Santos needed urgently to improve his situation. This case is also very important because its presence in the Inter-American System will impact the issue of human rights violations committed by the military police in Brazil (which, unfortunately, are a constant occurrence). Because of the risks to witnesses in trials involving allegations against the military police, very few people are willing to give evidence. The support provided to Mr. Dos Santos was therefore very timely, and made him more aware of the importance of pressing his case and seeking reparations, both nationally and internationally. It is likely that this will not only have a positive effect on this victim but also impact police practices in his country.