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PRESS RELEASE

OSCE Office in Tajikistan helps Ombudsman and civil society prepare for joint monitoring of closed institutions

DUSHANBE, 25 November 2011 - Monitoring closed institutions was the focus of a five-day training course for 30 civil society representatives and staff of the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman that concluded in Dushanbe today.

The course was organized by the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, in co-operation with the Embassy of the United Kingdom, the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation Tajikistan, the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), and the local non-governmental organization Nota Bene.

The training course helped participants develop tools and methodology for human rights monitoring projects to be carried out by members of the 12-organization Coalition for the Prevention of Torture, in co-operation with the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman. The Coalition and the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman plan to conclude a memorandum of understanding on joint visits to closed institutions.

Ambassador Ivar Vikki, the Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, said: "Human rights monitoring projects like these provide the Government of Tajikistan and its partners, including the OSCE Office, with important data that can be used to assess needs and design interventions in support of reforms."

Nigina Bakhrieva, a national expert and member of the training team, said: "The conclusion of the memorandum of understanding with the Ombudsman on joint visits to closed institutions will provide the first real opportunity for civil society monitoring of these institutions. Coalition members hope that this is the first step to ongoing, systematic monitoring efforts."

The Coalition for the Prevention of Torture, established this year, aims for a strategic and co-ordinated approach to torture prevention in Tajikistan. Applying lessons from this training course and fulfilling the terms of its memorandum with the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, the Coalition will monitor the situation in pre-trial detention facilities, prisons, psychiatric facilities and children's institutions in order to develop recommendations for improvements to the legislative framework, practice and further co-operation between state structures and civil society. Monitoring results will also inform the Coalition's alternative report to the United Nations Committee against Torture.

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