**Penal Reform International**

**CCPCJ 25th Session: Thematic Discussion on ‘Criminal justice responses to prevent and counter terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the financing of terrorism, and technical assistance in support of the implementation of relevant international conventions and protocols’**

**Oral statement**

**Agenda item: 4**

Thank you Mr/Mme Chair

An issue that has been raised increasingly in the past year related to criminal justice and prevention of terrorism is prison management of violent extremist offenders and the risk of radicalisation in prisons.

Penal Reform International would like to highlight a few considerations, drawing in particular on a roundtable organised by our office in Jordan. The report of this roundtable is on our website.

We want to stress, first and foremost, that a human-rights based approach is the key to addressing this problem. An approach to preventing radicalisation based exclusively on security and control is not sufficient: our response must be grounded in international human rights law and standards, and the rule of law.

When prisoners are dealt with humanely rather than alienated by neglect and ill-treatment, it becomes more difficult to recruit prisoners for violent extremist causes. In overcrowded, dilapidated prisons, on the other hand, and where prisoners experience discrimination based on their faith or origin, recruiters for extremist groups find it easier to attract followers.

Counter-radicalisation and violent extremist programmes should be part of an overall prison reform plan that includes: good prison management practices; proper filing and classification systems; quality prison conditions, including infrastructure and living conditions; and rehabilitation programmes. It also requires a wider criminal justice system that is fair and is seen to be fair.

Generally, measures to address security concerns for this group of prisoners are the same as for other prisoners, including high-risk prisoners which usually refers to serious gravity and circumstances of an offence, membership of an organised crime group or terrorist organisation. It is likely that radicalised or violent extremist prisoners are engaging in the same power-seeking and acquisitive behaviour that in other circumstances would be met by dominating others or joining prison gangs.

Assessing and addressing such risks requires prison staff that are well selected and trained in human rights-based approaches to managing and treating such prisoners, as well as tools to aid assessment and classification of prisoners. Training involves being able to recognise signs of radicalisation, understand the complexities of reintegration and rehabilitation measures, and secure their own safety and the safety of inmates, as required by the Nelson Mandela Rules. Classification and assessment tools need to take into account the capacity and available resources of the penitentiary system and respond to the local context and the size of the problem. Particular tools may be necessary for specific groups, such as women or child prisoners. Gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration programmes should be developed that take into account the history behind women’s involvement in violent extremist acts, including personal experiences, such as if they have been subject to sexual or other abuse. Child-friendly programmes for children who might be recruited whilst in detention or who are already radicalised should be developed. These programmes must focus on rehabilitating and protecting children from exploitation.

Efforts to counter religiously inspired radicalisation need to include faith-based dialogues using well-qualified personnel, such as Imams. It should also involve working closely with communities, both during and after imprisonment, so that there are positive models for reintegration. Existing good practice models are sorely needed, particularly those that are not prohibitively expensive. International collaboration and exchange of experiences are a necessity in this respect.

Finally, we need to understand the root causes of radicalisation, work on prevention programmes and address alienation. This will both help to prevent further radicalisation and enable the de-radicalisation and better rehabilitation of this group of prisoners, including through post-release after-care programmes.

Thank you, Mr/ Mme Chair.