

IPCA Europe Conference 31st March-2nd April 2014
Strasbourg

Notes on Feedback meeting held in the Munsterhof, Wednesday 2nd April

Questions for consideration in groups:

- 1) What are the lessons learnt from the conference?
- 2) What are the focus points for the future?
- 3) What and how are we going to achieve these?

Group One

What we have learnt:

- It is possible to make a difference to situations that concern us in our own contexts.
- It was very useful to learn about the European court of Human Rights, and we now have some knowledge of how we could use this forum.
- We recognised that the situation for chaplains is different depending on the country, e.g. in Britain chaplains are civil servants and are not allowed to publicly criticise the government.
- The importance of working as a group and not as individuals was stressed.

Focus points, and how we are going to achieve these:

- It is important on our return home to inform other chaplains in our own countries about the work of the Commission for the Prevention of Torture, and its potential relevance to our work.
- It would be good to have some way of involving IPCA in any difficult situation we may encounter in our own countries.
- If we are to take a case to the CPT, we should not focus on individual cases, but look at patterns.
- If we have a concern about a practise that is happening in our country, we should gather information from other prisons and make our case collectively, with facts and figures but not individual names.

Group Two

What we have learnt:

- We need to remember that we can be a voice for prisoners; We can talk to Governors on their behalf.
- We have learnt that we can have immediate access to the CPT.

- The CPT can act a “Lighthouse”, but this can take a long time. Prisoners need help immediately.
- The importance of IPCA is that in sharing and being together we are more powerful.

Focus points, and how we are going to achieve these:

- It would be good to strengthen the IPCA to make sure that they have access to the European structure.
- Our focus should be to encourage chaplains to keep trying to make a difference for prisoners.
- It is difficult to choose particular focus points when there are so many differences between countries, however it was agreed that the focus for the West should be preventative detention, and the detention of deportees.

Group Three

What we have learnt:

- We have learnt the difference between “rights” and “freedom”
- We all need to try to help those in prison to realise their rights and freedoms, and to ensure that they can exercise them.
- We must not take away hope, or the freedom to worship.
- In the Ukraine a difficult situation in the prisons will become much worse and more dangerous because of the political difficulties.

Focus points, and how we are going to achieve these:

- IPCA should establish a channel to the CPT and make them aware of the importance of the work of prison chaplains.
- We as chaplains should focus more on human rights.
- We as chaplains need to educate ourselves and our chaplain colleagues better: a good start would be for us all to go to the CPT home page and read our national report.

Could the website host a forum?

Group Four

What we have learnt:

- IPCA Europe conference is very important.
- We have been reminded that all human beings have equal rights, and that society does not have to punish any more than imprisonment.
- It has been valuable to learn how human rights are safeguarded by the European Union.
- It seemed that a lot of stress was put on the contribution of doctors and lawyers to committees. As chaplains we too are important and have something to contribute.
- The relationship between lawyers and prisoners is important, but prisoners can wait far too long to see a lawyer.

Focus points

- Some of the group felt that it is often difficult to be recognised by authorities in prisons, and had had the experience of not feeling welcome.
- There is a need to emphasise that the experiences and knowledge we have of prisoners is valuable.
- The importance of IPCA as a research organisation was highlighted

Group Five

What we have learnt:

- What we have learnt how the European Court of Human Rights could be empowering to us chaplains.
- Judge Power spoke about Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights and pointed out that there were 3 parts to it: torture, inhumane treatment, and degrading treatment.
- We need to be aware of what constitutes degrading treatment in our own contexts.
- We have learnt that it is fruitful to have colleagues from faiths other than Christian at the conference. Together we can form alliances and support each other.

Focus points:

- The advocacy role of the chaplain was emphasised. It was felt that as chaplains we could use advocacy to greater effect.

- One of the roles of IPCA is take information and make it more accessible for chaplains. This could help us to understand the standards we should all expect for our prisoners.
- The need to make a statement against the death penalty in Egypt, where over 500 have been condemned to death.

Group 6

What we have learnt:

- The conference has been valuable in allowing chaplains to pick up experience and skills from each other.
- Community chaplaincy is an example of chaplains taking back to their own countries ideas that have worked in others.

Focus points:

- The suggestion to invite prison ministers to future IPCA conferences: it is important to have someone with power and influence present.
- As chaplains we need encouragement: personal involvement in basic ethics concerning prisons.

Bill Cave stated that he is prepared to keep in touch on behalf of national groups, e.g. Dutch colleagues who would like to do sessions in their own language.

Group Seven

Expressed thanks for the possibility of taking part in the conference.

Agreed with what had been said by other groups.

This was an exclusive group: comprising Lithuanians and Ukrainians. There are no professional chaplains in these countries, all are volunteers. There are good and bad points to this.

What we have learnt:

- The conference has given more competence, and an understanding that as chaplains we are not just theologians,
- We have learnt more about the totality of the system

Focus points

- We will share knowledge about the CPT and Human Rights with other chaplains
- The ideas raised at the conference have been very valuable and will be shared with chaplains at home.
- Community chaplaincy is one of the ideas that could be introduced in our own contexts.