

## Interview with Silvia Casale (18 March 2002)

**Caption:** The criminologist Silvia Casale, President of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) since March 2000, briefly describes the role and main activities of the Committee in this interview given on 18 March 2002.

**Source:** Interview with CPT President Silvia Casale. [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: Council of Europe, [24.09.2003]. Available on [http://www.coe.int/T/E/Communication\\_and\\_Research/Press/Theme\\_files/Prevention\\_of\\_torture/e\\_InterviewCasale.asp](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Communication_and_Research/Press/Theme_files/Prevention_of_torture/e_InterviewCasale.asp).

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## Interview with CPT President Silvia Casale (18 March 2002)

The President of the Anti-Torture Committee has visited a great many places of detention to check on the treatment of inmates. In many countries, she says, there is a clear determination to make improvements in spite of economic difficulties.

Silvia Casale has been President of the Anti-Torture Committee (CPT) since March 2000. An internationally trained criminologist, she was born near London on 15 February 1945, studied German at Oxford and international law at Yale. The subject of her doctorate thesis was a comparison between the criminal law in the United States and the United Kingdom.

She has lived and worked in Sweden, the United States and the United Kingdom, where she is currently a member of the Sentence Review Commission for Northern Ireland, which decides on the release of persons imprisoned for terrorist activities. Her grandparents are of Italian origin and she speaks Italian, German and French in addition to English. She has been married to an American lawyer for 27 years and has a 22-year-old daughter. Her favourite pastime is gardening.

*Council of Europe (CoE): Where is the dividing line between ill-treatment and torture?*

**Silvia Casale:** It's not easy to define the difference. However, we refuse to provide a definition because this is a matter for the European Court of Human Rights, which, unlike the CPT, is a legal body. We're only responsible for the practical side of preventing torture and ill-treatment. When I go into a police station and talk to someone in custody, I don't worry about definitions. If the man is in pain and suffering, I'm concerned to put a stop to the violence against him. We work on the spot and it's our job to detect ill-treatment and examine conditions of detention so that we can make proposals for improvements, which is an important aspect of our work.

*CoE: How do you prepare your visits?*

**Silvia Casale:** Much of the work is done before the actual visit. We also rely on non-governmental organisations, which know the countries concerned and the conditions there. Of course, we can't visit every place of detention in a particular country: we can only inspect selected ones. However, you can draw certain conclusions about the general situation in a country by inspecting one of its prisons.

*CoE: Why do you so rarely make use of your only sanction, the public statement?*

**Silvia Casale:** We try to use the public statement as rarely as possible because it's the last resort when all else has failed. We are trying to prevent torture and ill-treatment, and in order to achieve this we have to work with governments and get the staff we talk to at places of detention on our side. When we leave a prison, we hope the staff will think a little differently about their work. And when we talk to prisoners I sometimes admire their courage, because they need courage to tell us about their ill-treatment.

*CoE: Does the public statement have an effect?*

**Silvia Casale:** It's a very powerful weapon. All states parties to the Anti-Torture Convention know that it means the country concerned is unwilling to co-operate, and governments don't take such an accusation lightly. The majority of countries are really anxious to make improvements, and they don't find it easy. In order to improve conditions of detention, they have to demonstrate political courage, perseverance and commitment and be able to assert their authority. Our influence mustn't be underestimated. We have managed to get some changes made. For example, we have arranged for tiny, dirty cells in the basements of prisons to be taken out of use. As I said, countries are obliged to co-operate with us and we don't let up in our demands, but keep on repeating them.

*CoE: You take some countries to task but use more diplomatic language with others. Why is this?*

**Silvia Casale:** The more often we have to repeat our demands, the more emphatic and insistent our language becomes. We must, of course, remember that every country has a different starting point. Some still have to tackle problems that others managed to deal with a long time ago. In some countries conditions are deplorable, but the authorities are making an honest effort to do something to change them and we think this has to be recognised.

*CoE: What has the Anti-Torture Committee achieved in the 12 years since it began its work?*

**Silvia Casale:** Considerable changes have been made, and you can see a clear determination in many countries to make progress on this issue. It's also a great achievement that 41 states are co-operating with the CPT. There is, of course, still a tremendous amount to be done, and when non-members of the Council of Europe are able to accede to the Convention from March 2002 onwards, our remit will become even broader. The positive aspect is that the European countries, which are so diverse and will, I hope, preserve their diversity, are uniting around a joint human rights project such as the outlawing of torture and ill-treatment. By acceding to the Anti-Torture Convention, the members of the Council of Europe demonstrate their clear intention to eradicate torture and ill-treatment.