

Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma and Torture (ARCT)

The Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma and Torture (ARCT) represents a non-for-profit, non-political and non-governmental organization registered and operating in Albania since 1994, designing and implementing programs which aim at “contributing in building a democratic society without use of torture and social justice in a country where strong political persecution has been seen for a long, almost 50 years period of the 20th century”.

The idea of ARCT was conceived primarily as a response to widespread torture practices perpetrated by state during the communist regime in Albania. ARCT’s early work in 1994 focused on providing medical and forensic documentation of injuries suffered by victims of political persecution, rehabilitation and possibilities that re-victimization never happens for the victims. While **no civil society organizations** were already actively advocating for greater respect for human rights which included **condemning acts of torture**, none was specifically addressing the need to provide medical evidence on torture that was capable of leading to conviction. An underdeveloped forensic facility within the criminal investigations department and lack of independence in carrying out investigations coupled with the culture of impunity frustrated efforts to hold accountable perpetrators of terrible crimes.

Combined with preventive approaches and litigation, the absolute prohibition of torture would have implied scrupulous documentation, investigation, and access to justice for existing and new victims of torture, violence and ill treatment in Albania.

Consolidated in its position as the promoter of the campaign Albania without Torture (in early 2007), accepted for the achieved standards in the penitentiary system (from 2009 – up to date), accredited in the UN bodies and mechanisms for the professionalism in providing clear-cut recommendations and consistency for the protection of fundamental freedoms in the country (through alternative reports since 2004- up-to-date), ARCT remains active as a hope for those victims who suffer state neglect and non-responsiveness.

ARCT has the benefit of multiannual experience gained while implementing programs during its existence. Broadly, support to the reform agenda, effective service delivery, development of knowledge based interventions, strengthening internal capacity and sustainability shall constitute ARCT’s key areas of focus during the planned period.

- **Priority Area 1** - Support and contribution to Country’s Reforms
 - Strategic Objective 1: *To inform and influence policy and legislation on the prevention of torture and fight impunity*

- **Priority Area 2 - Effective Service Delivery**
 - Strategic Objective 2: *To improve access to justice for victims of torture through medical, legal and psycho-social support*
- **Priority Area 3 - Promoting Sustainability**
 - Strategic Objective 3: *To nurture strategic alliances for the prevention of torture*
- **Priority Area 4 - Development of Knowledge Based Interventions**
 - Strategic Objective 4: *To enhance the use of research to prevent and respond to torture*

ARCT has great records of cooperation and support: being the first NGO who institutionalized a format of Memorandum of understanding which was granted full access to monitoring prison premises (2008), ARCT has been able to institutionalize mutual cooperation and recognition by the General Prisons Directorate through introduction of Modules on Effective documentation of Torture (Istanbul Protocol), Modules on Hunger Strikes Management, and Mental Health Protocols – officially integrated into the Prison professional Instruments.

ARCT does not work on membership basis, although it has different levels of management and decision making bodies which are explained as following:

- The ARCT Board and the Executive Council are the governing bodies; the Board is responsible to evaluate the progress of the activities (based on the financial and narrative statements), discuss the future commitment and recommend areas of improvement; approves changes in the Foundation Statute proposed by the Executive Council; elects the Executive Council members and the Executive Director.
- In collaboration with the Board members, the Executive Council is responsible for daily running of the Centre and the mobilization of human and financial resources. The Executive Director and the General Coordinator are members of the Executive Council. The executive council is responsible for the preparation of updates of the financial and narrative reports/ statements to be presented and approved by the Board; newly applied and committed projects, and prepare policies of fundraising and donor approaches. This process is constantly maintained through twice a year meetings and thorough discussions.
- The Centre is represented in relation with the third parties through its Executive Director, Mr. Adrian Kati. The ARCT is based in Tirana, but the projects that are currently implementing are covering all territory of the country: places of detention, psychiatric hospitals, police commissariats, border police units, etc.

ARCT has committed its capacities in providing assistance and improving the system of documenting the torture and ill treatment in places where public oversight was prohibited. Since

2008 ARCT operates actively within penitentiary system; police commissariats (2012); giving power to independent and professional oversight and meaning to the preventive approaches. Started in 2008 and finalized in 2011, ARCT uses a well developed and validated format of measuring the trends and prevalence of torture in places of deprivation of liberties. Well known experts from different professional backgrounds (Public interest Law and Human Rights, Health, Clinical psychology, Social sciences and Journalism) are representing the staff of the projects. They have PhD and MAs in their respective expertise and are keeping high-profile professionalism in the field of human rights.

ARCT believes that working towards common democratic goals such as respect for rule of law, human rights protection, fight against impunity and social injustice will bring all stakeholders together, representing an excellent opportunity for development of sound reforms in Albania.