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CHAIR OF UK TORTURE PREVENTION BODY CALLS FOR STRONGER GOVERNMENT FOCUS ON ERADICATING ILL-TREATMENT OF DETAINEES

Following publication of the 8th Annual Report of the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), its Chair today urged the UK Government to focus on the prevention of ill treatment in detention by guaranteeing the independence and resources of the NPM.

The NPM was established in 2009 by the UK Government to meet its UN treaty obligations under the United Nations' Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). The NPM's 21 independent bodies have powers to inspect or monitor all places of detention across the UK including prisons, police custody, immigration centres, secure settings for children and young adults and mental health settings. Through regular, independent monitoring of places of detention – conducted through thousands of visits every year – the NPM plays a key role in preventing ill-treatment in detention.

The Annual Report gives an overview of NPM members' extensive work monitoring detention across the whole of the UK. Read alongside the body's recently published figures on the large numbers of people who are detained across the UK (more than 110,000 on 31 March 2017), it underlines the scale of the task for members of the NPM in checking how people are being treated.

John Wadham, Chair of the NPM, said:

“The UK’s NPM has a unique tradition of professional inspectors and members of the community visiting places of detention and their role is an important check on what goes on behind bars and closed doors.

When people are detained the risk of ill-treatment is, unfortunately, always present and, as highlighted in recent inspection and monitoring reports from members of the NPM, they often experience very poor conditions in detention.

OPCAT provides us with a crucial framework to strengthen our work monitoring places of detention, and it encourages us to focus even more carefully on preventing ill-treatment in practice. It is essential that the NPM and our members are given the necessary tools and resources to perform our vital work effectively.

Next year we need to strengthen both the NPM and its members. A key challenge for the NPM is our informal status, lack of legislation and guarantees of independence and, finally, the inadequate nature of the resources available centrally. We are one of the very few NPMs anywhere in the world operating without legislation providing a secure basis for our work. This must change and we will continue to work with the UK Government to ensure this happens.”

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

1. The NPM's Eighth Annual Report gives an overview of its work monitoring detention across the UK from 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017. The report also details the NPM's thematic work on transitions and pathways between different forms of custodial settings and the body's recommendations for future action to ensure effective scrutiny across different organisational boundaries and improve the treatment of detainees. A copy of the Annual Report can be found on the NPM website: <http://www.nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk>
2. The NPM Annual Report was laid before Parliament by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice with an accompanying Written Ministerial Statement: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-02-20/HCWS469/>
3. The NPM was established in March 2009 under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT). A United Nations treaty, OPCAT was ratified by the UK in 2003. OPCAT requires the UK to have in place a 'national preventive mechanism' to visit all places of detention and monitor the treatment of and conditions for detainees.

4. In its 14th Report of 2016-17 "Part 1 of the Prisons and Courts Bill", the Justice Select Committee recommended the UK Government "place the NPM on a definitive statutory basis, in accordance with the UK's international obligations." (paragraph 36)
5. The NPM consists of 21 independent bodies throughout the UK, which have powers to regularly inspect or monitor places of detention and share the aim of preventing ill-treatment of anyone deprived of their liberty. It is coordinated by HM Inspectorate of Prisons.
6. The 21 bodies who make up the NPM are:
 - England and Wales*
 - Care Inspectorate Wales
 - Care Quality Commission
 - The Children's Commissioner for England
 - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons
 - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services
 - Healthcare Inspectorate Wales
 - Independent Monitoring Boards
 - Independent Custody Visiting Association
 - Lay Observers
 - Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Service and Skills)
 - Northern Ireland*
 - Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
 - Independent Monitoring Boards (Northern Ireland)
 - Northern Ireland Policing Board Independent Custody Visiting Scheme
 - The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
 - Scotland*
 - Care Inspectorate
 - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland
 - Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
 - Independent Custody Visitors Scotland
 - Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland
 - Scottish Human Rights Commission
 - United Kingdom*
 - Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation
7. The NPM's *Detention Population Data Mapping Project 2016-17* was published on 24th January 2018 and can be found on the NPM website: <http://www.nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk>.
8. The NPM found that more than 110,490 people were detained on 31 March 2017 across: adult prisons and secure settings for children and young adults in the four jurisdictions of the UK; residential immigration detention in the UK; and, mental health settings in England and Wales. Due to variations in the data sets and the way information is collected and recorded across settings and jurisdictions, the actual figure of people detained across all settings and jurisdictions will be much higher. The 110,490 figure does not include: detention in police custody; non-residential immigration detention; military or service detention; customs detention; or those detained under deprivation of liberty safeguards across all four jurisdictions. It also does not include those detained under mental health legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The numbers of people detained on 31 March 2017 do not include those in police custody (because of difficulties sourcing the data). However, the NPM research did find that between 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2017 there were at least 840,607 detention events in police custody across the UK.
9. Please contact John Steele in HMI Prisons press office on 020 33340357 or 07880 787452 if you would like more information.