

Response to EMDR European and international associations letter.

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The following is a response by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) to the criticism expressed by EMDR International Association and EMDR Europe Association in relation to our report and the Statement issued by the Independent Forensic Group (IFEG), which describe how the use of conversion therapy can be prohibited under the global ban on torture and ill-treatment.

We would like to thank the EMDR International Association and EMDR Europe Association for its strong and principled position against conversion therapy and for the specific points of criticism expressed in its letter to the Torture Journal.

We understand the criticism to contain the following elements:

1. The two instances of EMDR being used in conversion therapy are not scientific and are not sufficient to conclude that EMDR therapy could be a form of torture.
2. That the strong condemnation from the Swiss EMDR Association in relation to one of the two cases was not included in our report.
3. That the report focuses on methods rather than their unethical misuse in conversion therapy and the practitioners responsible for this.

In relation to point 1, our report is very clear and explicit in describing the methodology applied in identifying examples of conversion therapy and that the aim of the report is to create a global overview of the issue not to raise individual cases. Considering this context and the general absence of judicial consideration of the claims made by victims, we have relied on the stories as present by the individual victims. In relation to EMDR, we believe that the two cases, whose facts have not been challenged, are a clear indication that EMDR has been and therefore could be used in conversion therapy.

In relation to point 2, we are very pleased to note the response by the Swiss EMDR Association, which also seems to confirm that the case described in our report did in fact take place. Our report is not intending to criticise specific authorities or professional groups nor to map their responses to instances of conversion therapy. We therefore see no reason why the response by the Swiss EMDR Association or any other authority in any of the countries covered by the report would be included in the report.

In relation to point 3, we believe that this criticism has no grounding in the content of the report and in addition illustrates a fundamental misunderstanding of human rights law and the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. As the report shows, torture and ill-treatment is often perpetrated through the abuse of otherwise legitimate acts and the discriminatory targeting of groups and individuals. Human rights violations are caused by human action and inaction, not the mere existence of tools of methods that can potentially be utilised for inflicting severe physical or mental pain or suffering. Therefore, the report dedicates several chapters to perpetrators and the role of the State.

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Finally, we greatly appreciate that the EMDR International Association and EMDR Europe Association are concerned about how their methodology featuring in a report about torture will be perceived by potential clients. However, the sad reality is that much of the torture that takes place in this world is committed through the unethical use of otherwise legal tools and methods – sticks, electric wires and cables, music, water etc. Therefore, the biggest focus of our work and the very reason we wrote the report in question is to document how such tools and methods and being illegally repurposed in a way that inflicts severe pain and suffering on the people exposed to it.

We therefore hope that this response will address any further concern that the EMDR International Association and EMDR Europe Association may have so they can shift their focus back to the strong and principled advocacy against conversion therapy.