



HUMAN RIGHTS

JORGE AROCHE has a long history in working with survivors of torture and trauma. His involvement in this area precedes the establishment of STARTTS in 1988, and he has played an important role in laying its foundations, then in its growth and evolution since he joined STARTTS in 1989. Now he takes on a new challenge as president of the International Rehabilitation Council of Torture Victims (IRCT). He spoke to OLGA YOLDI.

The IRCT Elects New President

The last IRCT conference was a defining moment in the history of this movement. Tell us what happened. This was the biggest event – 124 member services out of 152 – and the first conference to be organised around concrete themes. It focused on the right to rehabilitation. There were several concurrent streams and more than 100 presentations. The plenaries brought together the perspectives of people who had lived through the experience of torture and of health professionals who have dedicated their lives to help heal the wounds of torture.

For example, there was a very poignant and inspiring presentation from a group of Mexican women who had been detained and raped. Indeed, rape has become a widespread practice by police. They described what had happened to them, how they were affected by the ordeal, their struggle to regain control of their lives and how they came to terms with it by helping other women who had been through the same experience.

The conference also brought the perspectives of health professionals who risk their lives every day working in rehabilitation centres in countries governed by repressive regimes. This is an experience quite foreign to people like us living in free democracies. Other plenaries focused on the global political situation and what is being done to prevent torture. There were clinical plenaries that looked at advances made in rehabilitation in different places and very different contexts. One of the particular aims of this conference was to share

advances in documentation and evaluation of programs. Enhancing our capacity in this area is critically important for the movement at this point in time.

In addition, there were 100 oral presentations in concurrent streams and also a session that displayed more than 100 posters. It was very successful indeed and the presentations I attended were of very high quality. It demonstrated the maturity of the trauma rehabilitation movement and how quickly it is evolving. All together it was an incredibly inspiring experience.

It became obvious to me that this should not be an isolated event. The last face-to-face general assembly and conference was 10 years ago.

How would you define the Mexico Consensus?

The Mexico Consensus embodies the essence of the IRCT movement – a consensus on the work the movement does, its values and its aims. Essentially, the IRCT advocates for the right to rehabilitation. It advocates the existence and provision of rehabilitation services and the exchange of information, knowledge, ideas and materials about rehabilitation. It has a role in the prevention of torture by working in partnership with organisations such as Amnesty International, and by providing input from a clinical and service providers' point of view.

The IRCT approach is to provide holistic rehabilitation, the type of rehabilitation that involves not only the individual but also the family, community and