The absolute prohibition against torture and other ill-treatment is a fundamental and non-derogable norm of international law. Law enforcement officers and officials from other investigative bodies are bound to respect and protect the inherent dignity and physical and mental integrity of all persons – including suspects, witnesses, and victims – during questioning. Nevertheless, the use of torture, other ill-treatment, coercion, and intimidation against persons in custody and during interviews, continue unabated in different parts of the world – and despite crystal-clear scientific and historical evidence that abusive and coercive techniques elicit unreliable information, and are indeed counterproductive, resulting in adverse operational, institutional, and public safety consequences.

In his latest thematic report, Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan E. Méndez (A/71/298) calls for the development of a Universal Protocol for investigative interviewing practices that are grounded in fundamental principles of international human rights law, identifying a set of standards for non-coercive interviewing methods and procedural safeguards that ought, as a matter of law and policy, to be applied at a minimum to all interviews by law enforcement officials, military and intelligence personnel, and other bodies with investigative mandates.

Drawing on the Special Rapporteur’s report, this side-event seeks to sensitize Member States to the need to develop model investigative interviewing that is non-coercive, ethically sound, evidence- and research-based, and empirically founded. Such a model would move away from accusatory, manipulative, and confession-driven techniques and provide state agents with positive guidance on how to operate the presumption of innocence in their pursuit of truth.

Panelists will provide input and comments on both the substantive and the advocacy levels, offering strategies for how to best ensure that the universally applicable prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, and the principle of humane treatment of detainees, are implemented in practice during questioning and interviews in different investigative contexts. The side-event will also provide a platform for Member States, UN agencies, civil society, and other relevant mechanisms and stakeholders, to discuss prospects for the development of a Universal Protocol for investigative interviewing and attendant safeguards.

Representatives of Member States, UN agencies and civil societies are cordially invited.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE EVENT PLEASE VISIT THE ANTI-TORTURE INITIATIVE’S WEBSITE AT: www.antitorture.org