



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2028



association for  
the prevention  
of torture

# WHO WE ARE

The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) works for societies without torture and ill-treatment. Founded in 1977, we helped establish a global system to prevent torture by increasing transparency in all places where people are deprived of their liberty.

We advocate for torture prevention at the international, regional and national levels, with an approach based on cooperation, dialogue and partnerships. Working with actors of change to achieve solutions that have their full ownership, we strengthen efforts to reduce the risks of torture and ill-treatment across the world.

Our 2025-2028 Strategic Plan builds on the APT's proven approach to preventing torture and ill-treatment, while adapting to emerging challenges and opportunities.



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## OUR VISION

Societies without torture and ill-treatment



## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to prevent torture and ill-treatment by:

- Influencing national, regional and international legal frameworks, standards, policies and practices to reduce risks of torture
- Supporting partners' efforts to advance torture prevention, and contributing our respective expertise and resources to maximise impact
- Bringing people together in constructive dialogue to build support for torture prevention and identify practical solutions

## OUR VALUES

### **Dignity**

We strive to uphold the inherent dignity of every person, including when they are deprived of their liberty.

### **Collaboration**

We build trusted partnerships with diverse actors. We are stronger when we work together to prevent torture and ill-treatment.

### **Perseverance**

We are committed to our partners, mission and strategies, knowing that torture prevention requires a long-term vision and tenacity.

### **Non-discrimination**

We place non-discrimination at the centre of our work, and advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion in everything we do.

### **Integrity**

We are impartial and independent of political, economic or sectarian interests. We are transparent, reliable and accountable in what we do and how we do it.



## WHAT IS TORTURE PREVENTION?

Torture prevention aims to mitigate the general and specific risks faced by people who are or may be deprived of their liberty and ensure the fulfilment of their rights. It is a holistic approach that looks beyond isolated incidents to identify and respond to patterns of complex and interconnected factors that place people at risk, as well as the beliefs and assumptions that drive harmful practices.

National preventive mechanisms, national human rights institutions, governments, law enforcement agencies, lawyers, judges, civil society, international actors and others all play vital roles.

## WHAT IS DEPRIVATION OF LIBERTY?

A person is deprived of liberty when they are unable to leave of their own free will any place, facility, or setting, whether public or private, that is under the effective control of state authorities. Such places, facilities and settings go beyond prisons and other traditional places of detention to include, for example, institutional care facilities, 'stops and searches' and immigration holding centres.

# APT STRATEGY (2025-2028) IN A NUTSHELL

## RISKS



Lack of effective oversight



People at heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment



Particular practices and moments

## OBJECTIVES



Effective oversight of deprivation of liberty

Strengthen systems to prevent torture through independent monitoring.



Dignity and fairness in the criminal justice system

Ensure the implementation of safeguards, ethical practices and accountability in law enforcement.



Safety and protection of people at heightened risk

Address the intersecting vulnerabilities of persons facing marginalisation, inequality and discrimination when deprived of their liberty

## ACTIONS



Advocate for legal reforms and safeguards at the national, regional, and international levels



Support partners globally to prevent torture and ill-treatment



Develop tools and resources for torture prevention efforts



# THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE: GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN TORTURE PREVENTION

Torture and ill-treatment are among the most horrendous violations of human rights and dignity. Yet, such abuses can happen in any country, in any place and at any time when people are deprived of their liberty.

The risk of torture and ill-treatment is heightened during crises, including armed conflicts and situations of political instability, and when national security concerns are prioritised over human rights. Mass arrests and incarceration increase and there is overuse of pre-trial detention, adding to overcrowding in prisons.

Similarly, when there is shrinking civic space and the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and freedom of association are challenged, the risks of torture and ill-treatment increase. When corruption is prevalent in criminal justice systems, these problems are exacerbated.

The weakening of multilateralism, the rise of authoritarianism, and various forms of extremism, are undermining the protection of human rights. Harmful ideologies – fuelled by social media and the propagation of torture as a ‘necessary evil’ in certain discourses – can reduce community support for the protection of people deprived of their liberty.

Discrimination and inequality place marginalised people even more at risk. Rather than addressing the root causes of socio-economic challenges such as poverty and drug use, detention is too readily employed.

Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, allowing independent oversight bodies to visit places of deprivation of liberty, has slowed.



Even in countries with independent oversight bodies, monitoring the deprivation of liberty is particularly difficult during peoples’ first moments of contact with the criminal justice system, such as during arrest or initial police custody.

New technologies offer opportunities for improved monitoring of detention conditions and human rights violations. But reliance on technology also entails risks. The increasing use of surveillance and artificial intelligence can lead to abusive practices such as profiling, the unlawful targeting of individuals, arbitrary detention or coercive interrogations.

With regard to prisons, another major challenge arises when states do not exercise effective control. This in turn can put the lives and welfare of detainees and others at risk and hinder access by monitoring bodies.

Similarly, when places of deprivation of liberty are privatised, or detention is ‘outsourced’ to other countries or conducted offshore, accountability, dialogue, and effective monitoring can be difficult to ensure.

Despite these significant challenges, the evidence is clear: torture prevention works, especially when the legal and political environment is supportive and there is a genuine commitment from all actors involved.

In recent years, more national preventive mechanisms (NPMs) have been designated to conduct monitoring, particularly in Africa. There is a growing support for the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering (the Méndez Principles), in recognition that ‘rapport-based’, non-coercive interviewing, combined with legal and procedural safeguards, is more effective than coercive interrogation methods. Training of law enforcement and prison personnel, when coupled with a shift in mindsets, can also contribute to a safer environment and the protection of human rights.

In addition, there is growing awareness of the root causes of torture, in parallel with global and national debates on racial discrimination in the administration of justice. Non-custodial measures have been progressively seen as crucial in preventing torture and ill-treatment.

NPMs in all regions have mobilised to improve the situation of women in prisons and strengthen protection of LGBTIQ+ people deprived of liberty. Torture prevention is also high on the agenda of national human rights institutions (NHRIs) across the globe. Family members of those in detention are increasingly organising through associations and networks, amplifying their voices as advocates for change and champions of torture prevention.

There is still a long way to go. Yet, drawing on five decades of experience, we are convinced that effective oversights of deprivation of liberty, improving safeguards in criminal justice systems, and protecting the rights of people in heightened situations of vulnerability can significantly reduce the risk of torture and ill-treatment.



# RISK ANALYSIS

In all instances of deprivation of liberty, there is an inherent power imbalance between persons deprived of their liberty and those in charge, increasing the risk of torture and ill-treatment. The following factors further compound these risks and guide our three strategic goals:

## Lack of effective oversight

Places or settings that lack independent monitoring or complaints and investigations mechanisms present higher risks of torture and ill-treatment. People in difficult-to-access or secret places of detention are particularly vulnerable to these abuses, and even to enforced disappearance. Erosion of the rule of law, corruption, impunity and a lack of accountability mechanisms that can address abuses by those in power all contribute to environments where oversight is weak or non-existent.

## Particular practices and moments

The risks of torture and ill-treatment are higher in cases of confession-driven interrogations, solitary confinement, incommunicado detention, cell and body searches, disciplinary sanctions, use of restraints and involuntary treatment.

High-risk moments include apprehension, stop and search, arrest, the first hours of detention, transfer, deportation, and arrival at new places of detention.

## People at heightened risk

Certain people face specific or greater risks of torture and ill-treatment, including violence and harassment, due to different contexts, cultural factors and individual characteristics and identities. People who experience intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, mental health or drug use are often among the most marginalised individuals in society, and are particularly at risk.





# THEORY OF CHANGE

## GIVEN THAT...

- All people are entitled to respect for their human rights and dignity, and to be free from torture and ill-treatment
- Torture and ill-treatment can happen in any country, in any place and at any time when people are deprived of their liberty
- Certain people face specific or greater risks of torture and ill-treatment, including violence and harassment, due to different intersecting factors
- Preventing torture and ill-treatment is about reducing these risks and addressing their root causes to create an environment where torture is less likely to occur
- The most effective torture prevention strategies require a combination of measures that engage various actors

## OUR MISSION IS...

to prevent torture and ill-treatment by

- Influencing national, regional and international legal frameworks, standards, policies and practices to reduce the risks of torture and ill-treatment
- Supporting partners' efforts to advance torture prevention, contributing our respective expertise and resources to maximise impact
- Bringing people together in constructive dialogue to build support for torture prevention and identify practical solutions

## THROUGH...

- Advocating for torture prevention at the international, regional and national levels
- Providing torture prevention expertise and advice globally, based on five decades of experience
- Focusing on specific priority countries to achieve concrete change where there is political will to advance on torture prevention
- Proposing a preventive approach based on cooperation and dialogue, bringing together actors in a spirit of collaboration
- Providing open access to evidence-based resources and online learning

## WE WORK WITH...

A broad range of actors, including:

- National preventive mechanisms (NPMs)
- National human rights institutions (NHRIs)
- International and regional human rights bodies
- States, government authorities, justice actors and law enforcement agencies
- Civil society
- Academics, researchers, and technical experts

## CONTRIBUTING TO...

- 1 Effective oversight of the deprivation of liberty
- 2 Dignity and fairness in the criminal justice system
- 3 Safety and protection of people at heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment

TOWARDS A WORLD WITHOUT TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT





# GOAL 1

## Effective oversight of the deprivation of liberty



Regular monitoring of the deprivation of liberty reduces the risk of torture and ill-treatment. Conducting visits - including unannounced visits - to places where people are deprived of their liberty, making recommendations and open dialogue with authorities are among the proven ways that oversight can drive positive change. For this to happen, states need to establish and properly resource independent oversight institutions and monitoring teams need skills, knowledge and expertise to be effective in their work.

Our strategy on oversight aims to have two key areas of impact.

### 1.1 Increased oversight of deprivation of liberty

We will advocate with state authorities, civil society and regional institutions to establish independent oversight bodies that are mandated to monitor all places of deprivation of liberty, public or private. This includes promoting the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and supporting the designation of NPMs and local preventive mechanisms. We will also encourage legislative reform where needed to ensure full implementation of these Conventions.

We will contribute our technical expertise to efforts to promote NPM establishment or designation. We will also work to enhance preventive monitoring by other oversight bodies, including NHRIs, judicial actors and civil society organisations.

### 1.2 Stronger oversight institutions

We will work alongside NPMs and other oversight bodies to co-create, mentor and provide technical support, strengthening capacities, independence and resilience. We will continue fostering formal and informal networks, bilateral exchanges and peer groups, to strengthen cooperation at the regional and international levels between NPMs and with other national stakeholders, such as NHRIs, civil society and law enforcement agencies.

To prepare for emerging challenges, we will conduct research and develop tools and resources that enhance the capacity of oversight bodies, supporting them to respond to emerging issues, such as advances in technology and overlapping mandates.







## GOAL 2

# Dignity and fairness in the criminal justice system

Across the world, a lack of legal and procedural safeguards, or a failure to implement them, along with practices like coercive interrogations and racial profiling, increase the risk of torture and ill-treatment. These practices have resulted in false arrests and confessions, wrongful convictions and grave miscarriages of justice.

Yet, when criminal justice systems uphold rights and are equitable, accountable and transparent, they prevent torture and ill-treatment, build public trust in state institutions and deter misconduct by law enforcement agencies.

Our strategy on criminal justice systems aims to have two key areas of impact.

### 2.1 Criminal justice systems implement safeguards

We will engage governments, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, prosecutors and legal professionals to promote legal and procedural safeguards that protect individuals from torture and ill-treatment. By facilitating exchanges, raising awareness and building capacity, we will support the national implementation of these safeguards, in line with the Principles on Effective Interviewing for Investigations and Information Gathering (the Méndez Principles).

We will promote human rights-based policing and advocate for systemic criminal justice reform. This includes ensuring that courts reject evidence obtained through torture and ill-treatment, judges and prosecutors are equipped to detect and react to signs of such abuses, and lawyers can defend fair trial rights of all people.

### 2.2 Law enforcement agencies become more accountable, ethical and transparent

We will advocate for accountability in law enforcement. We will work for the adoption of legislation to criminalise all acts of torture and ill-treatment. We will also promote effective external oversight of police actions and mechanisms to combat impunity, address complaints and misconduct.

We will promote exchange of practices to foster rapport-based, non-coercive interviewing, as well as a human-rights-based approach to policing. We will conduct and publish studies on key issues related to torture and ill-treatment by law enforcement agencies, with the aim of informing policy and advocacy efforts at national, regional, and international levels.





# GOAL 3

## Safety and protection of people at heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment

Persons facing marginalisation, inequality and discrimination are at a heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment when deprived of their liberty. Women, LGBTIQ+ persons, persons facing racial and ethnic discrimination, persons with disabilities or mental health conditions and persons who use drugs, among others, face specific – and often greater – risks to their protection, security and well-being when they are deprived of their liberty.

Mitigating these heightened risks requires a multifaceted and intersectional approach that addresses laws, policies, practices, cultures and behaviours.

Our strategy to protect people at heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment aims to have two key areas of impact.

### 3.1 Laws, policies and standards address risks and root causes of torture and ill-treatment

We will advocate with UN and regional human rights mechanisms to develop torture prevention standards that adopt a differentiated approach, to address the specific situations of people at heightened risks of torture and ill-treatment.

We will also support initiatives by national partners to advocate for laws and policies that integrate a preventive and intersectional approach. These efforts will be informed by analyses of the risks and root causes of torture and ill-treatment to increase the visibility of persons at heightened risk.

### 3.2 Authorities take special measures to protect the rights and dignity of people at heightened risk

We will develop tools and resources to support oversight bodies, inform national authorities, and better equip them to take measures to protect the rights and dignity of people at heightened risk of torture and ill-treatment.

We will also strengthen collaboration and coordination with different actors working in this area, including NHRIs, NPMs and civil society, and foster the sharing of experiences and good practices between them.

“Mitigating these heightened risks requires a multifaceted and intersectional approach that addresses laws, policies, practices, cultures and behaviours.”





# REALISING OUR AMBITIONS

## TORTURE PREVENTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Torture prevention is crucial to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies by addressing key targets such as:

- Reducing violence in all its forms (16.1)
- Protecting children from abuse and torture (16.2)
- Ensuring access to justice for all (16.3)
- Safeguarding fundamental freedoms (16.10).

It also plays a vital role in fighting corruption (16.5), promoting non-discriminatory laws and policies (16b) and building accountable, transparent institutions (16.6). By focusing on these areas, torture prevention strengthens justice systems and helps ensure human rights are respected.

Preventing torture supports the achievement of other SDGs. It contributes to ending violence against women and girls (5.1, 5.2), ensuring safe and dignified migration (10.7), fostering a culture of peace and non-violence (4.7), and promoting social inclusion for all (10.2). These efforts help create societies that are more just, peaceful and inclusive.



## IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, EVALUATION

We will implement our Strategic Plan through annual operational plans. In parallel to this, we will develop and implement a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) framework. Ongoing review of operational plans and MEL data allows for an iterative process of continuous improvement in the delivery of our Strategic Plan.

In support of this work and to continue strengthening our organisational capacity, we will also strive to:

## ENSURE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Our fundraising strategy will support ongoing implementation of this Strategic Plan. Securing adequate funding is also essential for the sustainability and ongoing impact of the organisation. Long-term, diverse and flexible financial resources will allow the APT to remain at the forefront of torture prevention efforts, achieving major milestones while leading on innovation.

## ENSURE SMOOTH FUNCTIONING AND PROMOTE STAFF WELLBEING

Recognising that our staff are our greatest asset, we will ensure internal human resources, financial and administrative policies are relevant and updated. These include clear guidelines for work conditions with a human rights-based approach, and a framework for personal and professional growth to attract and retain talent. We value inclusive practices and will seek to maximise collaboration and efficiencies, improving internal processes and systems wherever possible.



**TOGETHER,  
WE CAN PREVENT  
TORTURE.**



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