

# **#SafeInCustody:**

Changing minds, changing practice

**Hope-based communication  
and torture prevention**



## Our vision

Everyone should be safe in custody.

Safe from forced confessions.

Safe from incommunicado detention.

And have their human rights and dignity respected.

# What we know

The risk of torture and ill-treatment is greatest during the first hours of deprivation of liberty. This can include ill-treatment on arrest or being subject to incommunicado detention.

During questioning, police may seek to extract a forced confession to a crime.

The **#SafeInCustody** project sought to address risky police practices in Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand.



# #SafeInCustody goals



Increase transparency in police custody



Improve police practices



Build public support for torture prevention



# Our partners

The Association for the Prevention of Torture worked with civil society partners to plan and implement national and regional torture prevention initiatives:

- Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
- Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP)
- Cross Cultural Foundation (CrCF) in Thailand

#SafeInCustody ran from 2021 to 2024 and was funded by the European Union.





# Employing hope

We learnt how to apply hope-based communications to connect and build constructive dialogue with law enforcement, government, civil society, young people and others.





# Employing hope

Our project name and logo drew inspiration from hope-based communication principles: to set a shared vision for a world where everyone is safe in custody and torture is no longer practiced.







# Learning together

We held regional workshops in **February 2022** (online) and **February 2023** (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) to learn and discuss the fundamentals of hope-based communications.

In **October 2023** (Quezon City, The Philippines), we met together to share our experiences of applying hope-based communication in different projects and contexts.



# What is hope-based communications?

**An approach to social change activism,** based on narrative change and insights from fields including neuroscience, psychology and marketing.

**Which seeks to win public support** for policies by showing how they will work and the benefits they will have.

Grounded in the knowledge we are more effective when we focus on **advocating for the world we want,** based on shared values and goals

**“Our opposition is actually not the opposition. It’s cynicism. It’s not that people don’t think our ideas are right, it’s that they don’t think our ideas are possible.”**

Anat Shenker-Osorio



# The five shifts of hope-based communications

FEAR



HOPE

PROBLEM



SOLUTION

AGAINST



FOR

THREAT



OPPORTUNITY

VICTIM



HUMAN

# FEAR

Things to be worried  
about



# HOPE

Things to look forward to

We need to show the dream.

We need to show the dream.

Change comes from a mix of anger, hope and  
a belief that things can be better.

If we want people to feel empathy and act in  
solidarity with others,  
we need to foster hope in people.

# PROBLEM

The things that are wrong



# SOLUTION

The ways we propose to fix them

We need to show the outcome we want, then the process for getting there.

People understand what they can visualise, so we use images and stories that demonstrate the solution, as well as the problem.

We use facts and figures that make the case for our solution and reinforce that imagery.



# AGAINST

What we oppose  
and want to end



# FOR

What we want to create  
and what we encourage

We build our messages on basic values that no opponent can reject.

We want the story to be about our core values, not our opponents' values.

We remind people how our solution fits with their sense of how the world should be.

# **THREAT**

Risks we run by  
not acting



# **OPPORTUNITY**

The chance to  
make things better

We give people a sense of momentum and belonging, a wider trend towards positive change.

We present inaction and abuse as the injustice, rather than letting the abuses feel inevitable and natural.

## **VICTIM**

Focus on their  
suffering



## **HUMAN**

Relate to them and  
their choices

We share stories about people our audience can stand in solidarity with, rather than victims they need to save.

We foreground stories of shared humanity, courage and motivation.

**“May your choices  
reflect your hopes,  
not your fears.”**

Nelson Mandela



# Planning our engagement

Applying hope-based communication to a sensitive issue like torture prevention requires reflection and analysis.

We need to identify the real-world change we want to create (our purpose) and who can help us get there (our audience).



# Understanding our audience

Our communication starts with our audience, not our message.

Our target audience should be a specific group of people, sharing similar age, location, profession or other qualities.

The conversation is anchored in seeing the issue - and the challenges - from their point of view.

We use this approach in all our communication: public and private.



# Starting the conversation

Our messages are grounded in the 3C's

**Common ground:** What values do we share?

**Challenge:** What problem do we want to solve?

**Call to action:** What steps can we take as individuals

**Hope and honesty should be balanced in our messages.** This helps us define the most effective narratives to engage our audiences and push for change.




“Hope-based communication is not about ‘toxic positivity’. It does not seek to gloss over systemic problems or issues. Rather, it recognises that there are solutions for all human rights advocacy and this should inform our messages and how we deliver them.”

**#SafeInCustody regional meeting, February 2022**

# Tools for change

During the #SafeInCustody workshops, we explored different ways to strengthen our hope-based communications: photography, storytelling, cartooning, and data visualisation.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blazer over a red top, is speaking into a microphone. She is standing in front of a group of people seated at tables. The tables are covered with white cloths and have water bottles and papers on them. The background is slightly blurred, showing framed pictures on the wall.



# Photography

## **For hope-based communication:**

Our photos should reflect the values or solutions we want to promote

Challenge stereotypes in what we photograph and how the photos are framed

Collaborate with our subject, seek their input  
- and always 'do no harm'



# Storytelling

**For hope-based communication:**

Feature storytellers our audiences can stand in solidarity with

Present stories that foreground our shared humanity, courage and values

Ensure our storytellers are active participants in sharing and shaping their stories



# Cartooning

## **For hope-based communication:**

Use playful or satiric cartoons to spark a question or conversation

Use symbols or imagery that connects with people's values

Avoid representations that perpetuate prejudice or discrimination





# Data visualisation

## For hope-based communication:

Use visualisation to pose a question, show a trend or map an issue

Use visualisation to demonstrate that the proposed solution is possible

Use visualisation to highlight the experiences of those who are voiceless or vulnerable



# National activities: Malaysia

## #SafeInCustody cartoon competition

**When:** July-October 2022

**Who:** Young people aged 15-25

**Organiser:** SUARAM

Competition and exhibition showcased the hopes of young people for safe policing and fair justice systems



# Reflections: Malaysia

“People are like, “Oh, youth nowadays, it’s just TikTok, they don’t care about these issues.” But we got a lot of participants in our event, even during the exhibition a lot of people were coming in, because they want to know. When you give youth space, they’ll come and they’ll take the opportunity. But you have to create it.”

**Azura Nasron**

**Programme Manager, SUARAM**





# National activities: Thailand

## #SafeInCustody Schools

**When:** 2023

**What:** Seven #SafeInCustody Schools held around Thailand

**Organiser:** Cross Cultural Foundation of Thailand, with the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand

200+ young people took part in a dialogue about their rights in custody and how they can help build a torture-free society



# Reflections: Thailand

“The Safe in Custody Schools have been a huge success, right from the very start. Young people want to know about their legal rights under police custody. They have questions, they want to learn, they want to be informed. No one wants to leave the conversation. That is how you connect with people and build change.”

**Prakaidao Phurksakasemsuk**

**Deputy Director, Cross Cultural Foundation of Thailand**





# National activities: Philippines

## Basta! Run Against Torture (BRAT) XIII

**When:** 26 June 2023

**What:** 500+ people from police, government departments and civil society took part in the run through Quezon City, Philippines

**Organiser:** Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines and Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), together with the United Against Torture Coalition-Philippines

Public support for torture prevention and #SafeInCustody on International Day in Support of Victims of Torture



# Reflections: Philippines

“Hope-based communications have had an enormous impact on our relationship with the government authorities. They tend to perceive us as adversarial but, through #SafeInCustody, we have been able to change this mindset, build trust, and collaborate on activities. We all want those who are deprived of liberty to be safe in custody, so this initiative is also adding value for them.”

**Jerbert M. Briola Project Coordinator  
Task Force Detainees of the Philippines**





# Regional activities

## #SafeInCustody regional speech competition

**When:** December 2023-January 2024

**What:** Six university students representing Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand competed at a regional competition in Kuala Lumpur. The students were winners of their respective national #SafeInCustody speech competitions.

Showcased the energy and commitment of young people advocating for torture-free societies



# Regional activities

## 2023 ASEAN dialogue for a torture free region

#SafeInCustody partners also presented their insights at the 2023 ASEAN dialogue for a torture free region, sharing the importance of building constructive relationships among law enforcement, government, national human rights institutions and civil society.

# How did hope-based communication help?

- § **Transforming relationships:** Communication was central to shifting previously adversarial relationships with police, opening up new avenues for dialogue and cooperation.
- § **Promoting ‘buy in’:** High-level meetings on #SafeInCustody objectives held with government officials and law enforcement (Philippines), with police and government participation in the #SafeInCustody Schools programme (Thailand), among others.



# How did hope-based communication help?

- § **New collaborations:** Law enforcement authorities, especially in the Philippines and Thailand, engaged in training and dialogue on safeguards in the first hours of detention and gave support for the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism (Philippines).
- § **New conversations:** We opened new ways to engage with young people, especially in Malaysia and the Thailand, on issues around rights on arrest. In the Philippines, the #SafeInCustody Youth Advocates programme was established.



# What we learned

The social, cultural and political environment can be challenging and present risks to advocates and their organisations. **Hope-based communication is a creative and strategic approach to advocate for torture prevention** in these settings and empower the community to work for change.

This approach is valuable for highlighting the human rights obligations of government. **However, it is equally important to emphasise State accountability** to maintain the integrity and effectiveness of our messaging and human rights advocacy.



# What we learned

We recognise that **advocates and civil society commonly face obstacles just to have their messages heard** alongside mainstream narratives, especially those that foreground “community safety” and the need to be “tough on crime”. It is not an even contest of ideas.

**Advocates and civil society organisations can encounter legal restrictions, censorship and potential reprisals** for expressing their views. They also have limited resources to plan and implement their communication strategies.

A shift to hope-based communication alone is often not sufficient to bridge this gap. Additional strategies and approaches are needed.

# Applying what we learned

To complement our hope-based communication strategies:

- §. **Build strong coalitions** with like-minded civil society organisations to pool resources and establish a united movement for torture prevention.
- §. **Ensure the integrity of our messaging** by balancing hope-based narratives with an emphasis on accountability, as the situation requires.



# Applying what we learned

To complement our hope-based communication strategies:

- §. **Prepare comprehensive communication strategies**, including mainstream and social media, as an organisational priority, with capacity building for spokespeople.
- §. **Be consistent advocates for torture prevention** and stress the value of professionalism of law enforcement authorities, in line with community expectations.

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