



association for  
the prevention  
of torture



**APT**  
**STRATEGIC PLAN**  
2020–2023



## Introduction

The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) is an international non-governmental organisation, based in Geneva, Switzerland. For more than 40 years we have worked for societies without torture. We have contributed to the adoption and implementation of international treaties and established an innovative torture prevention 'architecture' that has been adopted in countries around the world.

Over four decades, we have successfully advocated for the preventive approach at the global, regional and national levels; built strong partnerships to support prevention efforts; gathered evidence to demonstrate that prevention works to reduce torture and ill-treatment; and become widely recognised for our leadership and expertise.

**The Strategic Plan 2020–2023** is the result of internal reflections, it was approved by the Board in April 2020. It builds on our strengths and achievements. It also responds to new challenges and opportunities as we continue to work for societies without torture.

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## Our vision, mission, values & principles

### Our vision

Societies without torture or ill-treatment

### Our mission

**Mobilize against torture through prevention:** we generate support for prevention from international, regional and domestic State and non-State actors;

**Engage key actors in constructive dialogue:** we facilitate cooperation between relevant stakeholders in pursuit of sustainable preventive solutions.

**Support national efforts to protect persons at risk:** we offer strategic advice, tools and expertise to our partners working at the national level to prevent torture and ill-treatment.

**Drive new thinking and analysis:** we inspire action to prevent torture and ill-treatment through our ongoing research into its risk factors and root causes.

### Our values & Principles

The APT is an international independent non-governmental organisation guided by strong values and principles that form the basis of our identity and work.

**Commitment:**

We know that preventing torture is essential to protecting human dignity, as well as for building good governance and peaceful and inclusive societies.

**Inclusion & equality:**

We place non-discrimination at the centre of our mission and promote diversity and inclusion in our work.

**Integrity and transparency:**

We work impartially and independent of political, economic, or sectarian interests. We are open and accountable to our partners, supporters and beneficiaries for what we do and how we do it.

**Partnerships:**

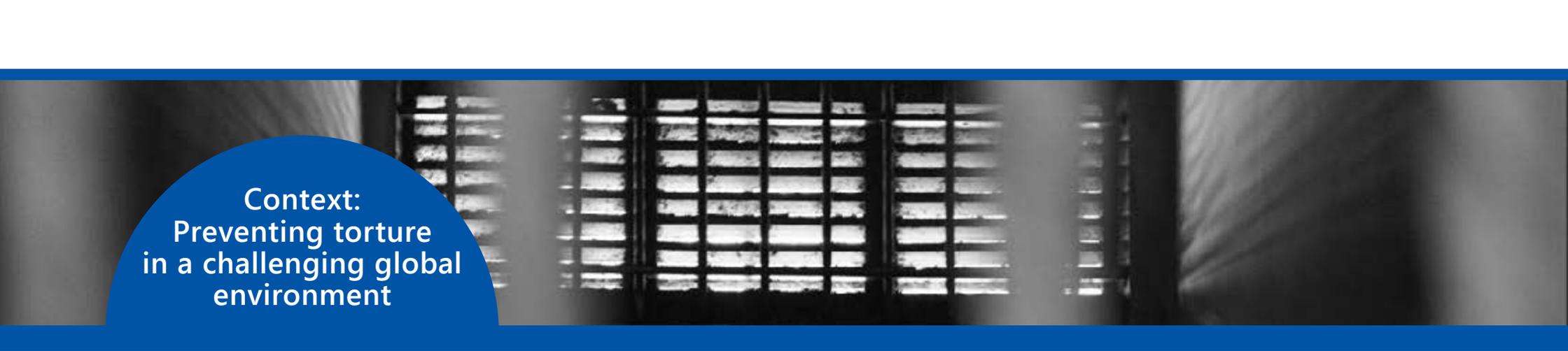
We strategically engage, ally and collaborate with a plurality of actors to develop sustainable prevention strategies. We call on duty bearers to meet their responsibilities and empower rights-holders to assert their rights. We strengthen the capacity of both, careful to avoid dependence on our advice and support.

**Quality and perseverance:**

We strive for excellence in seeking solutions to prevent torture and ill-treatment and in demonstrating the added value of torture prevention. We recognise that this work requires a long-term vision and we focus our efforts accordingly.

**Continuous learning and creativity**

We share skills, knowledge, experiences and perspectives across all areas of our work. We learn from our partners and encourage innovation and new thinking. We continually explore different ways to measure the impact of our work and use these lessons to build new actions.



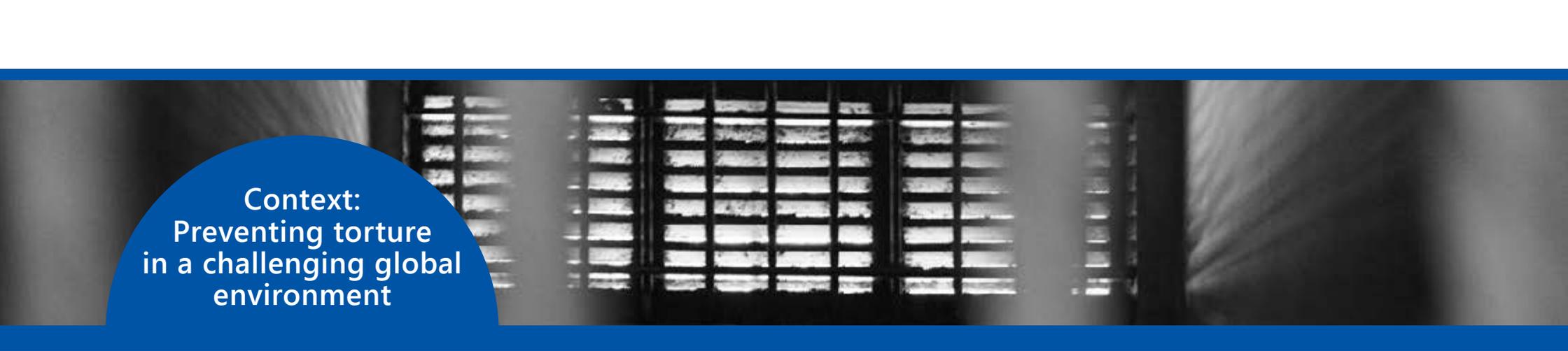
## Context: Preventing torture in a challenging global environment

Debates taking place today question the ongoing value of multilateralism and the international human rights system. In this context, the absolute prohibition of torture is under attack. Some political leaders – not only from authoritarian regimes but also certain democracies – justify or even condone its use. These discourse, combined with popular culture that present torture as acceptable, can lead to a worrying ‘banalisation’ or even tolerance towards the use of torture in certain circumstances.

The APT stands resolutely for societies where torture is always unacceptable and where it is legally and morally condemned. We will continue our advocacy by building strategic coalitions and partnerships and by using strong and creative communication.

The risk of torture exists in a variety of settings and contexts. These risks are heightened in situations of armed conflict, where people can be arrested or detained and tortured both by government and armed groups. Persons in contact with the criminal justice system, people on the move (i.e. refugees, asylum seekers and migrants) and all persons in situations of vulnerability face greater risks of torture and ill-treatment. That is why independent oversight of places where persons are deprived of liberty – including places such as psychiatric institutions and social care homes – is so essential. The bodies established under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT) play a significant role as agents for change and transparency.

A number of other global trends are impacting our work to prevent torture and ill-treatment. The rise of social media and new technologies, including artificial intelligence, offer opportunities to connect and mobilise with like-minded partners, as well as transform how we campaign and train. However, these same technologies present risks in relation to surveillance, protection of human rights and access to justice. The COVID-19 pandemic, along with the related economic and social crises, has a direct impact for people deprived of liberty, detaining authorities and those responsible for monitoring places of detention. In addition, climate change has become a key global priority. It will continue to impact on other human rights priorities, as well as create additional risks of torture and ill-treatment; for example, through climate-related migration and targeted attacks on environmentalists and human rights defenders.



## Context: Preventing torture in a challenging global environment

We will integrate these issues into our strategies and the way we work; for example, by minimising our environmental impact through distance support to local and regional partners.

It is important to highlight positive developments that have taken place within the international community, especially the recognition that prevention is an effective and constructive strategy to address systemic challenges and human rights violations. In this regard, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an opportunity to advance the prevention of torture and ill-treatment in a more holistic way by addressing many of the root causes, such as poverty, discrimination, corruption and violence, including for persons behind bars, and by promoting access to health, food and education.

The APT can provide a valuable contribution to many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and ensuring that our societies are free from fear and violence and that no one is left behind.

No country is immune from the risk of torture and ill-treatment. Our preventive approach is about reducing these risks. We have compelling evidence that taking measures to reform laws, policies and practices can help reduce these risks and make societies safer for all.

Prevention of torture and ill-treatment is needed, more than ever.

## How we prevent torture and ill-treatment

### RISKS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT EXIST EVERYWHERE. THEY ARE HIGHER...



...when there is no rule of law; a culture of impunity; corruption; an erosion of the absolute prohibition of torture and/or public acceptance of torture; poor access to justice; counter-terrorism measures; militarisation or privatisation of detention and security;



... when justice systems are dysfunctional and over-rely on confessions; or when institutional culture, recruitment and promotion policies pressure law enforcement to bring results;



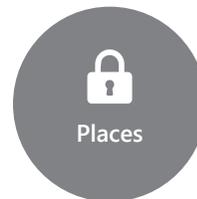
...in moments such as arrest; apprehension; stop and search; first hours of detention; interrogation; transfers; forced deportation; public demonstrations;



...in case of incommunicado detention; solitary confinement; disciplinary sanctions; threats/reprisals; use of restraints; involuntary placement; body searches; corporal punishment; capital punishment;



...for persons in situations of vulnerability who face invisibility, discrimination, profiling, harassment, violence, and over-incarceration because of their gender, age, migration status, nationality, ethnicity, economic status, disability, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, drug use;



...in closed places, such as prisons; police stations; psychiatric institutions; juvenile justice facilities; social care homes; quarantine centres; aged care facilities; overseas/offshore detention; secret places or places where there is no oversight.



## How we prevent torture and ill-treatment

**The Strategic Plan 2020–2023** builds on the APT's track-record, established over 40 years, and our commitment to reduce the risks of torture and ill-treatment.

In preparing our strategies and priorities for the next four years, we analysed the main areas of risks that lead to torture and ill-treatment. We have identified four interrelated areas of change to address these risks and prevent torture and ill-treatment:

- **Mobilise voices and arguments** to reaffirm the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment and demonstrate that torture prevention is effective
- **Mainstream the protection of persons in situations of vulnerability**, who are most at risk of torture and ill-treatment
- **Reform the criminal justice system**, to reduce the heightened risks during the first hours of deprivation of liberty and those associated with an over-reliance on confessions
- **Strengthen independent oversight**, to build more effective monitoring mechanisms.

These four areas of change are based on a series of assumptions on how change happens and how it will help reduce the risks of torture and ill-treatment. In a rapidly evolving context, we will regularly reflect on whether these assumptions remain valid to ensure our work is relevant.

**The Strategic Plan** sets out the APT's strategies to contribute to achieving these changes. These strategies constitute a framework of reference that informs our annual operational plans.



## How to make change happen

Our strategies draw on our operational experience and on strong evidence, in particular the findings of the independent research commissioned by the APT and conducted by Richard Carver and Lisa Handley.<sup>1</sup>

### Strategic assumptions

- Improved police practices and professionalism contribute to more effective policing, with better results and safer societies
- Exclusion of confessions obtained through torture and ill-treatment by the judiciary, in both law and practice, eliminates the incentive to use coercion during questioning
- Effective implementation of legal and procedural safeguards from the first moment of detention reduces the risks of torture and ill-treatment
- Non-coercive interviewing helps police obtain reliable information and ensure justice, while respecting human rights
- Regular and effective monitoring of police actions, including the use of force outside custody, reduces the risks of torture and ill-treatment

#### CHANGE:

People are treated with dignity and fairness by the **CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

### Strategic assumptions

- Increased visibility of persons in situations of vulnerability reduces the risk of torture and ill-treatment
- Eliminating discrimination and promoting equality in society, and respecting the specific needs of detained persons in situations of vulnerability, increases their protection
- Changing narratives and perceptions regarding persons in situations of vulnerability when deprived of liberty reduces the risk of torture and ill-treatment
- Giving specific attention to persons in situations of vulnerability by monitoring bodies and civil society organisations increases their protection

#### CHANGE:

Persons in situations of **VULNERABILITY** are safe from torture and ill-treatment

<sup>1</sup> R. Carver & L. Handley; Does torture prevention work?; Liverpool University Press; 2016; available at: <https://apt.ch/en/torture-prevention-works>



## How to make change happen

### Strategic assumptions

- New forms of communication on the need to prohibit torture, such as storytelling and visual communication, help build community awareness and support
- Research and information on practices amounting to torture, and on the links between torture and issues such as corruption and sustainable development, drives new strategies and new coalitions to prevent torture
- Demonstrating how torture prevention works strengthens advocacy for prevention policies and measures
- Working with new partners – such as the media, judicial actors and training institutions, academics and cultural leaders – multiplies the number of voices in support of preventing torture and ill-treatment

**CHANGE:**  
Strong arguments  
and new **VOICES**  
are mobilised  
to prevent  
torture

### Strategic assumptions

- Increased transparency of all places of deprivation of liberty through external oversight by international, regional and national bodies and civil society organisations reduces the risks of torture
- NPMs that are transparent and accountable, that conduct regular, unannounced visits and that produce evidence-based reports with SMART recommendations, increase protection for persons deprived of liberty
- Cooperation between oversight bodies helps them individually and helps build a strong and resilient oversight system

**CHANGE:**  
Effective and  
independent  
**OVERSIGHT** protects  
persons deprived  
of liberty



## Our strategies to contribute to change

### STRATEGY 1:

Improve police practices and respect for human rights

- International guidelines on non-coercive interviewing and associated safeguards are adopted and implemented in different regions
- More NPMs, NHRIs and civil society organisations monitor implementation of safeguards in the first hours of detention and extra-custodial use of force

### STRATEGY 2:

Strengthen the role of legal and judicial actors in preventing torture and ill-treatment

- Criminal justice actors recognise the importance of legal and procedural safeguards and implement them
- Law enforcement and judiciary policies and practices treat persons in situations of vulnerability with dignity and fairness

### STRATEGY 3:

Identify and address the specific needs of women, people on the move and LGBTIQ+ persons when deprived of liberty

- Laws and policies on deprivation of liberty recognise and address the specific needs of persons in situations of vulnerability
- Oversight bodies apply a gender-sensitive and SOGI-sensitive approach to monitoring all types of places of deprivation of liberty
- Persons in situations of vulnerability – in particular women, LGBTIQ+ persons and people on the move – are more aware of their rights when detained or when in contact with the law enforcement or criminal justice systems

### STRATEGY 4:

Contribute to the development of legal and policy frameworks to support torture prevention

- Public policies acknowledge and include a preventive approach to addressing torture and ill-treatment
- International standards and policies address risky practices and protect persons at risk of torture and ill-treatment

APT contributions

People are treated with dignity and fairness by the **CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

Persons in situations of **VULNERABILITY** are safe from torture and ill-treatment

**CHANGES**



## Our strategies to contribute to change

### STRATEGY 5:

Challenge perceptions and narratives justifying torture

- Creative communication and new partnerships reaffirm the ineffectiveness and absolute prohibition of torture
- Multidisciplinary research and evidence supports the inter-connections between torture prevention and other issues (including corruption and prevention of violent extremism)
- Storytelling and visual communication helps change public conversations and perceptions regarding persons in situations of vulnerability when detained

Strong arguments and new VOICES are mobilised to prevent torture

### STRATEGY 6:

Build effective and independent National Preventive Mechanisms, ensuring their integrity and accountability

- Additional NPMs in Africa are designated and functioning
- Monitoring bodies, including NPMs, are able to demonstrate the results of their prevention work
- States are held more accountable on the implementation of their international obligations, including OPCAT
- International and peer support systems strengthen NPMs and human rights NGOs in their monitoring work and in assisting persons deprived of liberty to protect their rights

Effective and independent OVERSIGHT protects persons deprived of liberty

Our strategies and changes will contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Developments, in particular:

### Impact on SDGs

SDG 16 on peaceful, just and inclusive societies and its targets: reducing all forms of violence everywhere (16.1); ending abuse and torture of children (16.2); ensuring access to justice for all (16.3); ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms (16.10); reducing corruption (16.5); non-discrimination in laws and policies (16b); and establishing effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels (16.6). Other SDGs: reducing discrimination and violence against women and girls (5.1 and 5.2); ensuring safe migration (10.7); building a culture of peace and non-violence (4.7); encouraging public-private partnerships (10.7); and empowering inclusion of all (10.2).



## How we will implement the Strategic Plan

To implement the Strategic Plan 2020-2023, we will build on our existing strengths, adopt new ways of working and embed a new organisational structure.

### PARTNERSHIPS

We will deepen our collaboration with monitoring bodies, especially NPMs, who are strategic partners in our work to achieve systemic change. We will strengthen our work with other long-standing partners, including civil society organisations, national human rights institutions, international and regional human rights bodies and law enforcement institutions, while also engaging new partners in academia, the media and cultural institutions. We will make full use of our recognised convening power to build bridges among different actors in support of torture prevention.

### GLOBAL REACH THROUGH DIGITALISATION

We will focus our interventions to a limited number of priority countries in each of the regions. We will develop partnerships, possibly through in-country representatives, and work holistically on the implementation of the different strategies. In Brazil, for example, we will continue to work with our national representative. Direct experience at the national level will enable us to scale up and reach out globally through online tools and e-learning. We will form a roster of experts and trainers, based in different regions, to contribute to face-to-face workshops. This will support the development of expertise while also promoting proximity, South-South exchanges and a reduced carbon footprint.

### COMMUNICATION AND INNOVATION

Communication will be a central part of our work, both globally and nationally, through a redeveloped website and using new forms of communication, including digital storytelling, comics and podcasts. We will drive innovative research on the root causes of torture and ill-treatment and pilot new technology and communication strategies to share our insights, lead conversations and reach out to a broader audience.



## How we will implement the Strategic Plan

### AGILE TEAM

The APT will adopt a new organisational structure to implement the Strategic Plan. We will operate with a small core team of Senior Advisers who each contribute to a diversity of expertise, competencies and talents. The strength of APT lies in its team and we are committed to investing in the wellbeing and development of our staff.

### DIVERSIFIED FUNDING SUPPORT

A new fundraising strategy will assist the APT to secure the funding necessary to implement this Strategic Plan. We will strengthen our relationships with existing donors, secure new donors and seek to diversify our sources of funding.

### MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Strategic Plan will be complemented by annual operational plans and a monitoring matrix. We will define clear indicators that measure the extent to which we are implementing our strategies and contributing to the changes we want to see.

# APT 2020–2023 STRATEGIC PLAN IN A NUTSHELL

WHEN THERE ARE RISKS OF TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT ...



Environments



Criminal justice systems



Moments



Practices



Persons



Places

...APT INTERVENES...



Changes and strategies will reduce risks

Our assumptions are based on strong evidence and 40 years of experience

...SO THAT CHANGES HAPPEN



**APT VISION: SOCIETIES WITHOUT TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT**