

International Women's Day 2021: An opportunity for global action to make justice fair, accessible and safer for women

8 March 2021. For the first time – today on International Women's Day – 41 oversight bodies from across the globe have joined with the Association for the Prevention of Torture to call for sustained government action to protect women in prison.

Around the world, more than 75 national and local independent monitoring bodies established under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT) – known as National and Local Preventive Mechanisms – work to uphold dignity and fairness for persons deprived of liberty.

We undertake regular visits to all places of detention. We conduct interviews in private with detainees, family members and staff. We document how the prison environment affects women, whether pre-trial or convicted. We prepare reports to authorities that highlight the discrimination and gender-based violence experienced by women in prison, including those in a situation of heightened vulnerability due to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, among others. Importantly, we develop practical recommendations to guide changes in law, policy, procedures and practices. We do all this based on sustained and constructive dialogue with all actors across the criminal justice system.

Monitoring the situation and needs of women is an important part of our work. It has been especially crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has put an additional strain on prisons worldwide, presenting new challenges to staff and exposing detainees to heightened risks. We have reported – and continue to report – on the impact that restrictions implemented to contain the virus have had on women. Many have been left isolated, emotionally affected and without material support following the suspension of family visits and restrictions on daily activities. Children have also suffered by being unable to see their mother. Based on our monitoring, we have strongly advocated for the implementation of early release schemes and alternative measures to detention for women.

We use the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules), adopted ten years ago, as a compass for our monitoring and to support our findings and recommendations. We also draw on other complementary standards, such as the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Yogyakarta Principles. In strengthening protections for women in prison and promoting non-custodial alternatives to detention, the Bangkok Rules are particularly relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We acknowledge the positive measures taken by States across the world to protect the rights of women in prison. However, there is a need for greater and sustained action, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. We therefore jointly call for a renewed commitment by all States to uphold the dignity, health, safety and security of all women in prison and to establish alternatives to detention for women in contact with the law. The Bangkok Rules, along with recommendations made by National and Local Preventive Mechanisms, provide States with a solid foundation to make justice fair, accessible and safer for women.

Signed:

- Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)
- **Austrian** Ombudsman Board as National Preventive Mechanism
- Comisión por la Memoria - Mecanismo Local de Prevención de la Tortura de la **Provincia de Buenos Aires / Argentina**
- Comisión Provincial de Prevención de la Tortura de **Mendoza / Argentina**
- Comité de Prevención contra la Tortura / **Chile**
- Comité Nacional para la Prevención de la Tortura de **Argentina** / CNPT-AR
- Commission nationale des droits de l'homme (CNDH) / **Togo**
- Human Rights Defender of **Armenia** as the National Preventive Mechanism
- Human Rights Ombudsman of the **Republic of Slovenia**
- Instance Nationale pour la Prévention de la Torture (INPT) / **République Tunisienne**
- Mecanismo Estadual de Prevenção e Combate à Tortura do **Rio de Janeiro / Brasil**
- Mecanismo Estadual de Prevenção e Combate à Tortura de **Pernambuco / Brasil**
- Mecanismo Local para la Prevención de la Tortura y Otros Tratos y Penas Cruels, Inhumanos y/o Degradantes de la **Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires / Argentina**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevenção e Combate à Tortura - MNPCT/**Brasil**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención contra la Tortura y otros Tratos o Penas Cruels, Inhumanos o Degradantes - Defensoría del Pueblo / **Ecuador**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención contra la Tortura (MNPT) / **Costa Rica**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención contra la Tortura MNP-CONAPREV / **Honduras**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención de la Tortura – Defensoría del Pueblo / **Perú**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención de la Tortura / **Paraguay**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención de la Tortura (INDDHH – MNP) / **Uruguay**
- Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención de la Tortura de la Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos / **México**
- Mecanismo Nacional para la Prevención de la Tortura y otros tratos o penas crueles, inhumanos o degradantes (MNPT) / **Panamá**
- Médiateur du **Grand-Duché de Luxembourg**
- National Center of the **Kyrgyz Republic** for the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- National Commission for the Prevention of Torture (NCPT) / **Switzerland**
- National Guarantor for the Rights of Persons Deprived of Liberty / **Italy**
- National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture / **Poland**
- National Preventive Mechanism – Commissioner for Fundamental Rights / **Hungary**
- National Preventive Mechanism – Ombuds Institution / **Croatia**
- National Preventive Mechanism – Protector of Citizens / **Serbia**
- National Preventive Mechanism - Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms / **Montenegro**
- National Preventive Mechanism - **Romanian** Ombudsman
- National Preventive Mechanism (Ombudsman's Office) / **Portugal**
- National Preventive Mechanism of **South Africa** (SA NPM)
- National Preventive Mechanism of the **Republic of Moldova** (Office of the People's Advocate)
- **New Zealand** Human Rights Commission as Central National Preventive Mechanism
- Oficina Nacional de Prevención de la Tortura y otros Tratos o Penas Cruels, Inhumanos o Degradantes / **Guatemala**
- Ombudsman of the **Republic of North Macedonia** - National Preventive Mechanism
- Public Defender of **Georgia** as National Preventive Mechanism
- **UK** National Preventive Mechanism
- **Ukrainian** Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights
- **Victorian** Ombudsman – **Australia**