Safeguards against torture and other forms of ill-treatment are rules and procedures that guide authorities to protect persons in police detention. Safeguards are practical and cost-efficient solutions to prevent abuse in custodial settings, where the risk of torture and other ill-treatment is highest.

This implementation tool describes how safeguards against torture in the first hours of police detention may be used to help States parties to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT) fulfil their obligations. While safeguards themselves are not typically strict Convention obligations, they are practical solutions to challenges faced in the prevention of torture and other ill-treatment during police detention. As such, safeguards help States fulfil various international law obligations, including those described in articles 2, 11 and 16 of UNCAT, among others.

To be an effective protection against torture, each safeguard must be implemented in a way that addresses the particular risks of abuse in any particular country. This tool provides examples to inspire good practices in implementation and to help States recognise any “gaps” in protection that still need to be addressed.

While the safeguards presented in this tool are effective in protecting many persons in police detention, extra measures may be necessary for persons with vulnerabilities or who are at heightened risk, including children, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTI, or any other reasons that make persons in police detention particularly vulnerable. States should consider whether and which extra measures are needed to address particular vulnerabilities or risks.

"It is well-known that the risk of torture and other ill-treatment is significantly greater during the first hours of police custody. To prevent torture during this heightened period of risk, safeguards must be put in place and implemented in practice...We call on every State to invest in safeguards to prevent torture and other forms of ill-treatment."

Joint statement in 2017 by UN Special Rapporteur on torture, Mr. Nils Melzer and three former Special Rapporteurs on torture, Mr. Juan Méndez, Mr. Manfred Nowak, and Mr. Theo van Boven.
For the purposes of this tool, "detention" refers only to the first hours of custody immediately after a person is arrested. It is not intended to apply to longer periods of pre-trial detention. The safeguards examined here are designed to protect a detainee during this period of heightened risk, while recognising that many of these safeguards will also serve to protect detainees in later states of detention as well.

Safeguards can have important benefits for States. They prevent police abuse, of course, but they also professionalise the police and the judiciary; they inspire confidence in police and criminal investigation; and they reduce the number of failed prosecutions, wasted court time, and compensation that may need to be paid for unjust treatment. As a result, the operation of safeguards can improve the whole administration of justice.

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Auajjar, Minister of Justice, Kingdom of Morocco, 2017.

Does Torture Prevention Work?

The latest independent academic research, Does torture prevention work? (Carver and Handley, 2016), found that safeguards in the first hours of detention contribute crucially to the reduction in the risk of torture and other ill-treatment in police custody. The research examined the experiences of 16 countries around the world over a 30 year period. More than 60 torture prevention measures were examined to record whether, and to what extent, each had been effective in torture reduction. The results of the research confirm that safeguards applied in the first hours of police detention, when applied in practice, are the most effective means to prevent torture.

According to the authors, “The most important preventive mechanisms are those that ensure that individuals are held only in lawful, documented places of detention; that their families or friends are promptly notified of their arrest; that they have prompt access to a lawyer, as well as to medical examination by an independent doctor; and that they are brought promptly before a judge.”

SAFEGUARDS

States have adopted a wide number of safeguards to protect the rights of persons when they come in contact with law enforcement authorities. Such safeguards also have the positive effect of streamlining processes and accountabilities, improving efficiencies, and supporting the overall administration of justice.

Some key safeguards are reflected in this tool:

- Notification of rights
- Prompt access to a lawyer
- Independent medical examination
- Communicate with a family member or third party
- Audio and video recording of interrogation
- Model practice for investigative interviewing
- Judicial Oversight
- Detention records
Notification of rights

All detainees must be informed of their rights and of the reasons justifying their detention, in a manner and language that they can understand. The importance of this simple safeguard to be informed of one’s rights is underlined by evidence showing that many detainees do not exercise their rights, such as access to a lawyer or asking for a doctor, because they do not know what their rights are, or how to ask for them. Notification of their rights gives people greater confidence and capacity to access them and to challenge his or her detention before a court.

African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights: informing of rights orally and in writing

The Guidelines on the Conditions of Arrest, Police Custody and Pre-Trial Detention (the Luanda Guidelines) of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (2014), provide that “at the time of their arrest, all persons shall be informed of the rights set out in section 4, orally and in writing, and in a language and format that is accessible and is understood by the arrested person”. A list of the rights to be communicated is included.

Since adoption, the Luanda Guidelines have been used in several African countries, both as the basis for workshops and trainings, for example, in Malawi and Tunisia, among others, and for the development of national guidelines by national human rights commissions.

European Union: model letter of rights

According to EU Directive 2012/13/EU (2012) on the right to information in criminal proceedings, anyone suspected or accused of having committed a crime in the EU must be informed promptly of his or her procedural rights in easy-to-understand language. The authorities are also obliged to give anyone who is arrested written information in the form of a “letter of rights” that includes the full list of important rights. The Directive sets out a model letter in the annex to assist EU Member States draw up a letter of rights at the national level.

Malawi: practical solutions in response to limited resources

With high levels of illiteracy, authorities in Malawi are faced with the real challenge of how to communicate rights to criminal suspects in an effective and cost-efficient way. One project, developed in partnership with civil society, has installed a speaker system in the holding cells at Blantyre Magistrate’s Court, which plays a tape recording explaining how and when to apply for bail. This ensures that all detained persons know about their legal rights prior to their first court appearance before a magistrate. The civil society Malawi Bail Project also distributes written materials in booklets to detainees.

People’s Republic of China: helping detainees access rights

Since 2003, China has supported efforts to distribute brochures and posters across a variety of vulnerable communities, aimed at making arrested persons aware of their rights. Posters titled “If you are arrested, know your rights!” list the rights all detainees may expect in police detention, and have been featured in police stations in urban centres across the country. Legal aid centres and justice sector officials, including police officers, have been active in distributing the materials to the public.
Prompt access to a lawyer

Many experts consider prompt access to a lawyer as among the most critical aspects in the prevention of abuse in police detention. Almost all States offer access to lawyers as part of trial preparation, but such access does not always extend to the first hours of detention, nor does it regularly include moments of most risk, including the interrogation itself.

States typically provide limited funding (“legal aid”) for persons who could not otherwise afford a lawyer to access legal services in the first hours of police detention. International standards on legal aid recognise that the assistance of national bar associations and civil society complement legal aid schemes and offer solutions where resources are not available.

Access to a lawyer serves multiple complementary purposes for the detained person, including preparing for their defence and safeguarding the due process of law. Yet even if the lawyer is focussed wholly on preparing a legal defence, their mere presence during the first hours of detention also acts as an important deterrent against coercion and other abuse.

**England and Wales: legal reforms leading to professional police culture**

With the adoption of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the UK began a reform process in England and Wales which led to meaningful changes in police culture and practice, prompted by a number of serious incidents and accusations of unfair convictions. Today, access to a lawyer is generally being achieved promptly and detained persons are offered access to legal advice from the moment of detention. All persons are notified of their right to legal assistance on arrest and, if requested, a custody officer ensures access to a lawyer either by phone or in person.

**Japan: duty attorney scheme**

Japan established a “Duty Attorney” system in collaboration with the national bar association. Any person arrested by police can request a lawyer and the police will contact the nearest local bar association. A lawyer is present and speaks with the arrested person in private before any police interview, to ensure the person is aware of their rights and is able to make contact with family.

**Sierra Leone: community paralegals improving access to justice**

With few qualified lawyers available and a growing number of people in pre-trial detention, Sierra Leone has recognised and encouraged the use of paralegals and adopted a legal aid law to support a variety of legal service providers. In cooperation with civil society, paralegals are trained in basic criminal law and criminal procedure and provided with the practical skills necessary to support suspects and to work with community members and justice sector officials. The use of community paralegals at the early stages of detention has increased the number of detainees released on police bail and helped minimise the risk of bribery and police abuse.

**Tunisia: important steps towards immediate access to a lawyer**

Tunisia undertook important reforms to its Code of Criminal Procedure in February 2016, strengthening multiple safeguards against abuse in police detention. Among other rights now provided in law, detainees have the right to a lawyer upon arrest and to have the lawyer present at interrogations. Unless the detainee waives this right in writing, he or she is not required to answer any questions or participate in any interrogation.

It is not possible or reasonable to imagine that justice can be done without independent and competent lawyers. States must therefore ensure that lawyers are in a position to practise their profession without obstacles [-], including by setting up institutionalized legal aid schemes free of charge for those lacking resources.”

Ms. Monica Pinto, former Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, 2016.
Independent medical examination

As an effective safeguard against abuse including torture in police detention, a person should have the right of access to a doctor, including the right to be examined, if the person detained so wishes, by a doctor of his or her own choice (in addition to any medical examination carried out by a doctor called by the police authorities). When realised, this safeguard provides an independent and objective witness to a person’s injuries which serves to deter torture and ill-treatment and provides a way to report, record and end abuse.

States should remove obstacles that reduce the potential for this safeguard to prevent torture and ill-treatment in practice. In particular, States should make facilities available that allow medical examinations to be conducted out of the hearing, and preferably out of the sight, of police officers. Training for health professionals should also build capacity to detect and document injuries of torture and ill-treatment. The Istanbul Protocol on Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has served to increase the efficacy of medical examinations.

India: female doctors for female detainees

The Indian Criminal Procedure Code provides that any arrested person has the right to an examination by a medical practitioner both when he or she is produced before a magistrate or at any time during their police detention. Additionally, whenever a woman is arrested, she may only be examined by, or under the supervision of, a female registered medical practitioner.

Lebanon: establishing a specialised forensic unit

In June 2017 a Forensic and Psychological Examination Unit was opened at the Palace of Justice in the city of Tripoli in northern Lebanon, to ensure that all persons arrested receive a physical and psychological examination as a means to prevent and prohibit torture. This is a pilot project and delivers the first specialised centre of this type in Lebanon; it is anticipated that more forensic units will be established in other parts of the country.

Turkey: obligatory medical examinations

During the 1990s when abuse in police detention was frequently reported, Turkey responded by putting in place a system of multiple obligatory medical examinations, as soon as possible after arrest and again after a period in custody, as well as at the end of detention. The success of the system of medical examinations was credited with the reduction in widespread ill-treatment in Turkey during this period, such that the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture considered in 2009 that Turkey no longer needed a system of multiple compulsory examinations and the system was subsequently simplified.

Communicate with a family member or third party

The right to notify and, in some cases, directly communicate with a family member or another person of the individual’s choice promptly after arrest is a human right frequently protected in law. Beyond the psychological comfort from being able to notify family of the situation of detention, it also enables the family to contact a lawyer (if not already done) and monitor their treatment in detention. Notifying family members of the detention ends the period a person is held incommunicado and thereby reduces the risk that a person will be disappeared.

When contact with the outside world could prejudice an ongoing investigation, States can temporarily place reasonable limits on how and when a detainee may communicate with a family member or third party. Due to the importance of the safeguard, however, any limits on notification to the family or third party should be justified on legal grounds and strictly limited in time. The delay might also be rebalanced with other safeguards, such as a clear written record of the delay and early judicial supervision.
**Australia: supervised telephone call**

In Australia, Part IC of the Crimes Act 1914 (Cth) provides a legal framework for a number of important safeguards, including a right of the detainee to inform a relative or friend of his or her whereabouts. This is typically achieved with the detainee making a telephone call in the presence of a police officer.

**Hungary: enabling family notification**

Police in Hungary overcame the practical challenge that many detainees do not remember the telephone number of their family by inviting the detainee to find it on their mobile phone. If the family member or third person does not answer their phone, or if there is no phone number, a police officer is sent to deliver notification in person. The fact of notification is recorded in a form which is signed by the detained person. Although the law in Hungary requires police officers to notify family only within 24 hours of arrest, the notification generally takes place shortly after detention.

**Kosovo: no reason for delay of notification in cases of juveniles**

Juveniles that are detained by the police require particular care. In Kosovo, the police are under a legal obligation to immediately notify a family member or, if a family member is not available, contact the national Centre for Social Work on the arrest of a child. Due to the special vulnerability of juveniles, the law provides that under no circumstances may notification be delayed for the purpose of an ongoing investigation. The law has been well implemented in practice: in 2016, a report by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture commended the fact that a family member or the Centre for Social Work is always informed promptly following the arrest of a juvenile.

**Audio and video recording of interrogation**

Recording of police interrogations acts to deter police from using violence, coercion, or other forms of ill-treatment in securing a confession. Recording also protects police against false accusations of abuse or intimidation, and operates as a robust piece of evidence of the interview and the information divulged. Accompanying its use, clear and proper management processes should provide for access, storage, and destruction of recordings and data.

Where audio or video recording is used, good practices encourage that the recording starts at the beginning of the interview, that all persons present are identified, along with the time and location of the recording, and that the interview is properly recorded in its entirety, including any breaks being noted. If recording is discretionary or incomplete, a risk remains that police abuse will simply shift to moments and areas not covered by these technologies (“blind spots”), and that incriminating recordings are lost or deleted.

Certainly, audio and video recording of interrogations implies some financial costs, although the wide availability of different forms of cheap technology with video or audio recording possibilities makes this safeguard much more accessible than in the past. States using such technologies have also indicated that any costs are recovered through the time saved by police and judiciary in administration and court processes that are no longer needed.

*“Video recording of interrogations helps protect the rights of suspects in the incidence of forced confessions since many government staffers are eager to quickly finish the case. The measure would help avoid unjust, false and wrong charges.”*  
Professor Su Wei, Chongqing Municipal Committee, CPC, PR China, 2017.
Fiji: piloting mobile video recording of interrogations

Following their ratification of UNCAT in 2016, Fiji embarked on reforms to raise the standards in the Fijian police and reduce the acknowledged incidences of assault in detention. As part of these reforms, Fiji purchased 30 video recording devices to be used in interrogation situations. New Standard Operating Procedures have been agreed to allow such recordings to be admissible in court. The procedures provide that each recording is made on three disks, to ensure the complete integrity of the evidence, and one is given to the suspect. With training, Fijian police were encouraged to become more familiar with the recording procedure and to see the potential benefits. Fiji anticipates that far fewer confessions will be challenged in court, reducing delays, police time at court and related costs.

Republic of Ireland: video recording of interrogation and use of CCTV

In 2006, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture commended the introduction of audio-visual recording in many police interrogations, finding that recording in the interrogation rooms of police stations may have been a contributing factor to reducing the amount of ill-treatment alleged by detainees. The CPT also welcomed a wider system of CCTV recording in a pilot project in Dublin whereby most parts of the police station are being monitored with cameras.

Model practice for investigative interviewing

As police interviews represent one of the situations where the risk of abuse is high, in 2016 the UN Special Rapporteur on torture recommended human-rights compliant minimum standards for investigative interviewing that refrain from using any type of coercion (UN Doc. A/71/298). Interview practice must not resort to any direct or indirect physical or undue psychological pressure to induce confessions.

When used effectively, professional investigative interview techniques increase the quality and likelihood of obtaining relevant information from a suspect, which in turn supports the credibility of investigations, the fairness and outcomes of criminal prosecutions, and overall trust of citizens in the administration of justice and in their police services. (See CTI Training Tool 1/2017 Investigative Interviewing)

In addition to a non-coercive approach, a number of associated good practices should accompany the police interview. The time and place of all interrogations should be recorded, together with the names of all those present and this information should also be available for the purposes of judicial or administrative proceedings. Rules should also provide clear minimum procedures and limits for interviews, and provide for refreshment and rest breaks. Additional considerations are needed for child suspects, witnesses and victims, such as being accompanied by a responsible guardian.

Indonesia: training on non-coercive techniques in line with criminal procedure code

In Indonesia, article 117(1) of the Criminal Procedure Code provides that all evidence must be given without pressure of any kind. In order to be more effective and ensure the integrity of interview evidence, Indonesia has recently begun to train its police to use non-coercive investigative interviews rather than a traditional interrogation model which had prioritised a confession.
Norway: from interrogation to investigative interviewing

Norway has adapted the PEACE model of investigative interviewing first developed in the early 1990s in Britain in response to a number of documented forced confessions and wrongful convictions. The “investigative interviewing” model provides for non-coercive interviewing that is designed to promote accurate memory retrieval and lessens the drawing of premature conclusions based on assumptions about guilt or innocence. Norway has trained its police in investigative interviewing and has used it successfully to investigate and prosecute crimes for several years, including in terrorism cases.

PEACE stands for:

- Planning and preparation
- Engage and explain
- Account
- Closure
- Evaluation

Judicial Oversight

Being brought promptly before a judge or other judicial officer after arrest is a basic right protected in international human rights law and is a common State practice. In presenting a detainee physically before a judge, the judge may assess the legality of the detention and see if there are visible signs of torture or ill-treatment, ask the detainee how he or she has been treated, critically examine detention records for gaps or inconsistencies, and consider allegations made by the detainee. Judges have a duty to refer a case of suspected torture or ill-treatment to the competent authority for investigation where there are reasonable grounds to believe an act of torture or ill-treatment has taken place.

In 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture recommended that persons held on criminal charges must not be held by investigative authorities for more time than absolutely necessary to hold a judicial hearing and obtain a judicial warrant for pre-trial detention, and many States have set in law the maximum period allowed for police detention before being brought before a judge, as 24 or 48 hours (with exceptions).

Brazil: new system of custody hearings

Custody hearings were introduced in the Brazilian city of São Paulo as a pilot project in 2015, as a result of collaboration between the Brazilian National Judicial Council (CNJ), the Ministry of Justice and a civil society organisation. Since the pilot, custody hearings have been introduced in the state of Rio de Janeiro and other state capitals across Brazil.

At a custody hearing, persons arrested in the course of committing a crime are brought before a judge within 24 hours. The judge hears from the detainee and decides whether to hold the person in pre-trial detention before trial. The judge also reviews the legality of the arrest, how the arrest took place, and considers any force used or allegations of abuse.

Early results from the pilot custody hearings procedure are promising. Many judges require training on the new hearings, but civil society report that the procedure saw detainees being given advice by a lawyer sooner and that the physical presence of detainees in front of a judge made torture and ill-treatment much more detectable.

Chile: judges monitor and enforce detainee rights

To ensure effective judicial oversight after years of a military dictatorship, Chile took the step to make judges responsible for the detainees’ bodily integrity in Law No.19.047, adopted in 1991. Subsequent reforms to criminal procedure introduced a Procedural Guarantee Judge to monitor and enforce detainees’ rights in detention. The
result of such reforms has been that many more detainees are brought in front of a judge without delay and are granted access to a lawyer. The reforms have been credited with a noteworthy reduction in the practice of torture in the criminal justice system. In a number of regions of Chile, judges and judicial actors are also mandated to manage criminal investigations and visit places of detention. During such detention visits, judges and judicial actors are able to verify the conditions and legality of detention.

**Jamaica: judicial supervision of interrogations**

Encouraged to provide transparency and ensure the integrity of police investigations, Jamaica requires that a Justice of the Peace or a lawyer be present during all interrogations. A Justice of the Peace is a voluntary post for a person of unquestionable integrity who seeks to promote and protect the rights of individuals and helps to give justice to those persons in a particular community. The work of Justices of the Peace at police stations in Jamaica has been commended as one of the reasons that torture, in the classical sense of deliberately inflicting severe pain or suffering as a means of extracting a confession of information, was not found to be a major problem in Jamaica. Jamaica has since undertaken to strengthen the capacity of Justices of the Peace and other public actors with training on legal rights of criminal suspects.

**Detention records**

The protective scope of many safeguards is dependant, to a greater or lesser degree, on the cooperation of the detaining authorities to share complete and true records of persons in their custody. A process of registration and recording is therefore an essential part of an effective system of any place of detention.

International standards recommend that a comprehensive detention record is made and is updated contemporaneously throughout the period a person is detained. The record should be held in a centralised detention register and the management of the register should be properly documented.

**UN Human Rights Council Resolution 31/31 (2016)** encouraged States to maintain up to date official registers of persons in police custody that as a minimum, contain information about:

a) the reasons for the arrest

b) the time of the arrest and the taking of the arrested person to a place of detention, as well as that of his or her first appearance before a judicial or other authority

c) the identity of the law enforcement officials concerned, and

d) precise information concerning the place of detention.

The Human Rights Council also recommended that States should communicate such records to the detained person or his or her counsel, as prescribed by law.

**Paraguay: model detainee registers distributed throughout the country**

During a visit to Paraguay in 2011, the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture noted the detention register system was inadequate, as it did not allow for the effective monitoring of the arrivals and departures of detainees nor compliance with procedural safeguards. As a result, the Ministry of the Interior designed model detainee registers for distribution in all the country’s police stations and, since 2011, five thousand copies of the model detainee registration books have been distributed for use across the country.
STRATEGIES TO PUT SAFEGUARDS IN PLACE: THINGS TO CONSIDER

A holistic torture prevention strategy requires that practices designed to protect detainees from police torture and ill-treatment overlap and complement additional measures of prevention, including robust laws and review by independent monitoring bodies. In all cases, multiple safeguards should work together to ensure that gaps in protection are reduced.

Review of existing procedural safeguards

- How are procedural safeguards already protected in national law?
- Are there programmes in place to ensure that all persons in police detention have access to lawyers? And medical doctors?
- Have steps been taken to ensure the safeguards protected in law are effectively implemented in practice?
- Where are the gaps in protection? If allegations of abuse have been made, what safeguards would prevent the possibility of abuse in future?
- Do existing safeguards offer sufficient protections for persons in situations of vulnerability? Are specific safeguards needed to protect children and juveniles, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTI and others in detention?
- How could existing rules and procedures be strengthened to more effectively safeguard persons in police detention?
- What training or other capacity building initiatives are already in place, or how could these be strengthened or adjusted to equip police to deal with new procedures?

Implementing new safeguards to prevent abuse

- Has advice been sought to ensure the particular risk is addressed effectively through the implementation of new rules, practices and procedures?
- How could the implementation of new safeguards be piloted to effectively tackle practical challenges, and fully understand any institutional resistance or training needs?
- Could resources and technical assistance be secured with the assistance of international partners?
- In contexts or areas of particular risk, should multiple safeguards be implemented in a targeted way for a limited time only?

Building capacity for prevention

- Are police, prosecutors and judges trained on procedures and rules to safeguard against torture and ill-treatment?
- Are police, prosecutors, and judges encouraged to see the various administration and time benefits of safeguards against torture?
- What training programmes and materials could be developed for the police, prosecutors, judges, and lawyers in order to more effectively operationalise safeguards in practice?
- Are lawyers trained in practical criminal defence skills; in torture detection and reporting; are they aware of relevant complaints mechanisms?
- Have steps been taken to ensure detainees have meetings with lawyers and medical doctors in private?
- What guarantees are given to ensure the confidentiality of doctor and lawyer meetings?
- Are family members, lawyers and doctors, as well as independent visiting mechanisms, able to raise complaints of torture without fear of reprisal or being barred from professional practice?
Enforcement

- Is evidence obtained in violation of safeguards excluded from the criminal case? How is this determined?
- Could judges require administrative or other sanctions in cases where safeguards are not followed?
- Are institutional bodies invited to review the implementation of safeguards and work with national authorities towards more effective operation?
- Safeguards can be made more robust by their inclusion in legal and procedural codes, as well as codes for professional practice. How do such codes address the failure to act in accordance with safeguards against torture?
- Is compliance of safeguards required by law, or at the discretion of the authorities?
- How may persons complain of a breach in any of these safeguards? How is the data collected and recorded? How are complaints handled?
- What sanction follows the failure to observe any particular safeguard in practice?

Additional resources:

UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988
