

Questionnaire for Candidates to the Committee against Torture (CAT)

1. **Name:** Dr Anton Symkovych

2. **Nationality:** Ukrainian

3. **Current position:**

Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University of Melbourne, Australia;

Senior Research Associate, Sociology Department, University of Johannesburg, South Africa;

Member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*;

Member of the Advisory Expert Council of the Criminal-Executive Service of Ukraine.

4. **The CAT and GA resolution 68/268 require experts to possess “recognized competence in the field of human rights” and “in particular in the field covered by the relevant treaty”, including to give consideration to the usefulness of “some persons having legal experience” (article 17). Please explain how you qualify as an expert.**

My engagement with human rights began during my student years when I volunteered for the Ukrainian Red Cross. This experience evolved into an academic career centred on empirical prison research in the Global North, South, and East. I hold advanced degrees in criminology, which includes a strong law component, and social work. My professional experience in Californian juvenile facilities and British, South African, and Ukrainian prisons has equipped me with in-depth knowledge of international human rights law, including the Convention Against Torture and its implementation instruments, and of the lived realities of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. I am recognised internationally as an expert on penal subjectivities and non-Western prisons, with a strong record of peer-reviewed publications and participation in multiple penal reform projects.

5. **According to the Addis Ababa Guidelines, “Treaty body members shall not only be independent and impartial, but shall also be seen by a reasonable observer to be so”. Do you have any experience or affiliation that could be considered a real or perceived conflict of interest (e.g. holding a position within or on behalf of your country’s government)? If so, how do you intend to address it, to ensure full independence and impartiality in the exercise of the functions?**

I have never held any position within or on behalf of the Ukrainian government or any other government. I do not have any affiliations that could constitute a real or perceived conflict of interest. My career has consistently been rooted in academic, civil society, and international collaborative contexts, which ensures both actual and perceived independence and impartiality.

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As evidenced by my publications and interviews, my assessments of carceral systems and human rights conditions globally are informed, rigorous, and critical—yet they remain constructive rather than adversarial. I am committed to upholding the highest standards of objectivity, fairness, and integrity in all professional undertakings, including those related to the work of the Committee.

I fully embrace the Addis Ababa Guidelines, which affirm that members are accountable only to their own conscience and to the Committee itself, not to their State or any other State. This principle of independence is one I have long practised in my academic and professional life, and which I would uphold with the utmost seriousness if elected.

6. If elected, how will your professional commitments enable you to dedicate the necessary time and attention to perform your duties effectively, both during and between sessions?

I am accustomed to balancing multiple high-level commitments across continents, and my current academic role provides the flexibility to prioritise Committee-related work. If elected, I will adjust my teaching and research schedules to ensure full and effective participation in sessions, preparatory work, and follow-up activities.

The Committee's sessions (April, July, and November) largely coincide with university non-teaching periods, which will further facilitate my availability. Furthermore, my university supports flexible arrangements, for example, concentrating teaching in one semester, which allows me to dedicate several uninterrupted months each year to the Committee's work. In addition, I will be on sabbatical in 2026 and long-service leave in 2027, enabling me to take on additional responsibilities if required—such as serving as Rapporteur, joining a working group under rule 112, leading capacity-building programmes, conducting training and workshops on reporting, and developing practical tools (including manuals and guidebooks) for government officials, NGOs, and other stakeholders in State parties.

7. In your view, what is the role of civil society, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs), in engaging with the Committee in relation to its mandated functions? In your opinion, how can the voices and experiences of survivors of torture and other ill-treatment be meaningfully considered in the Committee's functions and working methods?

Civil society, NHRIs, and NPMs are indispensable partners in the Committee's work. They provide independent monitoring, detailed reporting, and crucial insights into the lived realities of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Their engagement serves as a vital preventive mechanism, allowing the Committee to detect systemic risks, identify institutional gaps, hold states accountable, and support the effective implementation of CAT recommendations.

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Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), NHRIs, and NPMs provide deep knowledge of individual countries and intimate insights into their complexities, offering authoritative and objective analysis of the situation on the ground. They contribute not only through preparing alternative reports but also through sustained engagement during and after reviews. In so doing, they make State Party reporting processes more effective, inclusive, and comprehensive. NGOs thereby advance transparency and accountability while embodying their societies' aspirations for human rights and universal human dignity.

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in protecting torture victims, often working in constrained environments and at times facing reprisals. Through them, and thanks to the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, hundreds of thousands of torture survivors and their families worldwide receive redress and medical, psychological, social, legal, humanitarian, and other support. This empowers survivors, helps them to recover from the trauma of torture, and rebuild their lives. Civil society's role in mobilizing community movements and ensuring that survivors' voices are heard is indispensable.

As a strong proponent of epistemic justice, I believe the voices and experiences of survivors must be central to these processes. The power and pain of survivors' stories cannot be underestimated. Centring survivors in anti-torture initiatives, including ensuring their representation in decision-making processes, is essential—both as a means of achieving more effective prevention and as an aspect of redress in and of itself. Survivors should be meaningfully integrated into the Committee's working methods through structured consultations, participation in hearings, and inclusion in reporting and follow-up processes. Their perspectives must inform the Committee's dialogue with State parties and shape its recommendations and priorities. This ensures that the Committee's work remains relevant, grounded, and informed by lived realities rather than abstract principles alone.