



STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2024

THE OMCT AND ITS SOS-TORTURE NETWORK

**A call to action:
Together, we can.
Let's mobilise
to end torture!**



THE GLOBAL VOICE FOR ENDING TORTURE

PART I: CONFRONTING THE ‘NEW NORMAL’- RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

I. CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGE: A CALL TO ACTION FOR THE SOS-TORTURE NETWORK

The OMCT's Strategic Plan 2021-2024 (Strategy 2024) defines the organisation's primary framework for the coming four years. It sets out our overall ambitions and goals together with our main programmatic goals and institutional targets. The plan is meant to be read jointly with the annual operational activity plans and their monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Strategy 2024 has been developed at a time when States' commitment to human rights and multilateralism is weakening. Surging populism and authoritarianism worldwide challenge the very values of universality and our consensually developed protection systems, and these agendas frequently lead to policies that increase torture and impunity. In many parts of the world, the space to defend rights continues to close. The increasing insecurity in which our members work, including acts of terrorism that lead States to renege on commitments to fundamental values and rights, rising migration flows, and increasingly polarized political discourses worldwide, with a shift away from democratic models, are challenges that push some to question the fundamentals achieved by the global human rights movement. These challenges have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the securitization of health policies across the globe. Together, all of these weaken, atomize and fragilize local human rights actors and the movement globally, and threaten to usher in a 'new normal' that extends well beyond the pandemic.

In response to these challenges, it is time to step up the protective reach of the OMCT and its SOS-Torture Network, and to actively mobilise for human rights, justice and the eradication of torture. Our cause and approach could not be more relevant for today's world. The Covid-19 crisis has provided ample evidence that police violence, including both custodial and extra-custodial torture, is often enshrined in, and enabled by, deeply rooted discrimination, abusive institutional cultures, and broad protection gaps. In many instances, policing is used as a form of social control targeting the poor, the marginal and the vulnerable. Broken punishment and detention systems with unparalleled risks to detainees' health, and to their physical and psychological safety, including from torture and ill-treatment, have all come to the fore across all regions, revealing failed punishment policies and system failures that can no longer be ignored or denied. Far from supporting civil society as actors who provide support to those most in need, some States are seizing opportunities to further suffocate critical

voices and challenge the essence of the right to defend rights. With an economic downturn looming as a result of the pandemic, we are to see a deepening of social divisions and inequities, with more violence, impunity and marginalisation as a grim harvest.

This plan is a call to action for the OMCT and its global SOS-Torture Network and fellow human rights defenders, but also to the broader public: together, we *can* push back to end torture.

Strategy 2024 sets a path for a strong, agile and impactful movement to build momentum, placing our common struggle against torture at the heart of advances toward democracy and development, and proving its relevance in debates on security, migration, equity, social justice, sustainability and well-being.

To do so, the OMCT and our Network must adapt, regroup and innovate to defend the standards and structures that bind the global movement against torture, to affirm our core values, and to provide the support for our Network to advance. The OMCT has fostered coalitions and joint actions with local anti-torture and human-rights activists and organisations around the world for more than 35 years, supporting their participation in a growing human rights movement that has never been as global as it is today. In the coming years, we aim to bring the multiplier effect of collective action to fruition, and to scale our impacts.

Convinced that we can achieve more by speaking out together, as a global anti-torture movement, the OMCT is mobilising and giving a voice to the actors and to civil society organisations who generate its driving force. This plan centrally seeks to upgrade the OMCT to embody a global voice emanating from its Network, offering new support to local actors, building stronger bonds and ways of working together, opening our movement to other sectors, and amplifying the global voice of our movement for human dignity and rights.

II. ABOUT OUR UNIQUE PLACE IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The OMCT's vision:

Our vision is a world free from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and related human rights violations and in which all victims, including the most marginal and vulnerable, are protected and can access justice and receive remedies and reparations.

The OMCT's mission:

Our mission is – with the SOS-Torture Network – to eradicate torture, summary executions, disappearances, arbitrary detention and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and to provide protection to all victims through a global network acting in partnership and solidarity. Our mission includes the protection of the women and men who defend the rights of others.

The OMCT's theory of change:

Our theory of change is based on the conviction that lasting change requires strong local actors who provide support to victims of torture, document and report torture; who provide the necessary expertise to governments, engage them and demand their accountability for torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary executions and detention. These actors need a voice to anchor their struggle globally and a structure to provide support, coordinate protection

and build expertise to enable impact locally, regionally and globally. They also support to access multilateral systems that advance the protection of rights and provide a protective harbour to victims, defenders and actors in times of need. Our approach is built on the assessment that no single organisation or strategy, acting alone, could have achieved the advances against torture over the past decades, including those the OMCT contributed to. And neither could local organisations struggling against torture in their home countries have done this acting alone. OMCT's theory of change is that lasting progress in the fight against torture requires a strong, competent, and inter-connected civil society working together in complementarity and solidarity.

The OMCT's SOS-Torture Network:

The OMCT works with more than 200 organisations, which constitute its SOS-Torture Network, to end torture and ill-treatment, fight impunity and protect human rights defenders worldwide. Together, we make up the largest global group actively standing up to torture in more than 90 countries. Helping local voices be heard, we support our partners in the field and provide direct assistance to victims. The distinct network structure builds the unique strength of the OMCT, enabling us to benefit from:

- Trusted and tested partnerships that draw on readily available, reliable, first-hand information from the field in widely diverse settings and contexts, including in difficult-to-access locations;
- Specialised and context-specific expertise and access to some of the finest anti-torture defenders working on different aspects of torture, needed for building durable protection agendas regionally and universally and to build excellence in our Network;
- A strategic role as civil society coordinator for the Committee Against Torture, which can be mobilised as a universal change mechanism when CSOs around the world engage to use the United Nations' principal mechanism against torture to legitimise and reinforce local reform agendas;
- A strategic role as a mechanism of support and protection to human rights defenders, including through its co-lead on the EU Human Rights Defenders Protection mechanism ([Protect.defenders.eu](https://protect.defenders.eu)).

The OMCT's approach:

The OMCT believes in a **holistic approach** to counter torture, combining prevention, protection, victim assistance and reparations including rehabilitation. Similarly, our actions involve a mixture of emergency and crisis-response capacity as one of our hallmarks, a high degree of flexibility and agility to respond to urgent needs, while building increasingly mid- and long-term advocacy strategies based on trusted and tested local partnerships to promote legal and preventive policies.

Over the years, the OMCT has built **specialised expertise** in paying attention to the needs and specificities of those most vulnerable to abuse, including the poor, the marginalised and the excluded, and those who may suffer torture in specific forms and circumstances, such as women, LGBTIQ+ persons, children, racial and ethnic minorities, migrants, and other vulnerable communities. This is a cross-cutting approach in all our areas of work.

Last but not least, the OMCT is today one of the **leading global organisations for human rights defenders**, providing protective advocacy, material assistance, and building resilience to enable actors to continue their work

under threat. It is the only anti-torture organisation with one of its two key pillars devoted to the protection of defenders at risk. Indeed, without a vibrant civil society sector and individuals standing up to defend and protect human rights, the anti-torture movement would not go anywhere. Supporting a global movement of local organisations and protecting human rights defenders are part of the same seamless web of protection that the OMCT seeks to provide to the anti-torture movement.

5 STRATEGIES

WINNING
BACK
SUPPORT

OPENING SPACE
& RIGHT
TO DEFEND

PROMOTING
REFORMS

PROTECTING
THOSE AT RISK

PUSHING BACK
ON IMPUNITY

A
STRONGER
NETWORK

SUSTAINABILITY

NETWORK
RENEWAL

3 INVESTMENTS

COLLECTIVE
ACTION

III. SETTING OUR AMBITION: A VIBRANT MOVEMENT AGAINST TORTURE RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Our ambition:

To power the global struggle against torture through a robust SOS-Torture Network that strengthens, remains steadfast, agile, resilient and innovative, builds stronger legal defenses, more impactful advocacy, and wins debates by attracting new and more diverse actors to our cause.

This reflects our ambition to scale up the movement united in the SOS-Torture Network to confront the multiple challenges we face, and create the collective force to set protection agendas, to push positive reforms, to secure the right to defend rights and to communicate compellingly on our cause to policy makers and to the broader public alike. To achieve this ambition, the Strategy 2024 sets out five forward-looking strategic priorities, while also keeping in mind the need to defend the gains made over the years against today's populist winds.

Our strategic priorities:

The strategic priorities of this plan are not mutually exclusive but porous and interdependent, reflecting the holistic approach of the OMCT to conduct energies from its Network and amplify them to further reinforce actions. This plan also sets out institutional targets to strengthen the structure that anchors the Network and its multiple struggles (see below under part III – institutional targets). The strategic goals provide a diverse toolbox - reflecting the diversity of expertise within our Network - adjustable to local needs and priorities. Transversal across all priorities is our civil society-driven Network of local actors, coming together in a global movement.

Priority I, Public Engagement:

Winning back global resolve on the absolute prohibition

Over the coming four years, we will invest in the ability of the OMCT and its global Network to position the issue of torture as a key international concern. We will raise the understanding of its centrality and relevance for many of the broader societal debates on justice, security, development and democracy. We will launch a global SOS-Torture index jointly with our Network. We will work to equip and empower the OMCT and its Network to speak out and campaign more compellingly on torture, to draw more and new actors into our movement.

Priority II, Accountability:

Winning justice for victims, and pushing back on impunity

Over the coming years we are seeking to step up our work with the SOS-Torture Network to challenge persistent impunity over torture or other serious violations that are part of our mandate. We will work to mobilise across regions to build more litigation, maintain and renew our victim assistance as a safety net globally, and advance protection agendas. We will further develop our capacity to respond to emergencies and crisis situations by supporting members and partners in documenting violations and advocating for accountability locally and internationally.

Priority III:

Pushing for reforms and universal systems

Over the coming years, we will intensify our support to the SOS-Torture Network to pursue domestic reforms and to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. We will build on our formal role as coordinator for civil society engagement with the UN Committee Against

Torture to build advocacy circuits from local to global, and from global to local. We will address systemic challenges on detention and policing that came to the fore during the Covid-19 crisis. In light of the unprecedented challenges to multilateralism, we will work to protect the universal human rights system and seek to strengthen its role in providing protection on the ground.

Priority IV:

Protecting the most at risk (situations of vulnerability)

In line with OMCT's long-standing approach, we will pay particular attention to the protection of those in situations of vulnerability or most at risk, such as the poor, the marginal or the migrants, and those who may face torture and abuse in particular ways, such as women, children or indigenous peoples. We will support our Network to provide protection and collectively raise the need for better frameworks of protection regionally and globally.

Priority V:

Protection, resilience and the right to defend

The protection of human rights defenders is the oxygen for the protection of rights and a condition sine qua non for a successful and sustainable struggle against torture. Over the next four years, we will modernise and strengthen our protection programme with its trusted and tested tools and we will work to anchor the EU Human Rights Defenders mechanism as a standing comprehensive mechanism. We will also launch a new initiative to protect human rights defenders in detention (SOS Defenders). We will go beyond the protection of human rights defenders, building better resilience, strategy support and advancing the recognition of the right to defend rights.

PART II: STRATEGIC AND PROGRAMMATIC GOALS

PRIORITY I: WINNING BACK THE PUBLIC

Our goal: to mobilise public support for the absolute prohibition against torture, and to foster the consensus against torture and its relevance for increasing social well-being across all sectors – democracy, development, and rule of law by drawing in new actors to support our struggle.

Our lessons learned:

For the struggle against torture to succeed, we need to better communicate and campaign to convince policy makers but also the broader public.

Anti-torture actors often focus largely on legal and institutional change, limiting the impact of our work and rendering anti-torture organisations more vulnerable to attempts to question their legitimacy. Toxic discourses on terrorism, violent extremism, and migration are further contributing to closing civic space and to an environment of exceptionalism that lead to the relativisation of the absolute prohibition against torture. And while there is legal consensus on the absolute prohibition of torture, opinion polls suggest that the public is increasingly accepting torture in certain circumstances, including in Western democracies.

Even when torture is formally rejected, it often stays in a dark corner, which explains a poor understanding of its impact on communities, democracy, the rule of law, security or development. This is partly due to a lack of robust data, information that would render the often invisible effects of torture visible and usable. As a result, we are losing ground to other causes and tend to be seen less of a priority. This also directly impacts the access to resources of our Network members on the ground, thus hampering the sustainability of our movement.

Our way to bring change:

Over the next four years, it is our central aim to bring the issue of torture out of its dark corner, shed light on its true dimensions and impact, and communicate in compelling ways to different audiences. To this end, we have overhauled our communication system and will invest in the communications of our Network to develop narratives and targeted collective campaigns, combining authoritative data with story-telling and hope-based communications. We will build on the work within a Network-wide working group on terrorism and torture to respond to laws and policies that undermine the absolute prohibition and we will develop targeted messaging for our Network in difficult policy areas such as terrorism, migration, and others. However, to reset and “re-taboo” torture, it is time for an ambitious global initiative. The OMCT will now develop a global torture index jointly with SOS-Torture Network, to trace and measure the risk of torture,

generating a new impetus through innovative communications and campaigns against torture. We will thus support local causes while setting a global agenda on torture, showing its relevance for many other societal debates.

Our key actions:

- Launch a global torture index jointly with the SOS-Torture Network that traces and measures the risk of torture and empowers local and global advocacy campaigns to support local reforms and elevate our struggle as an important item on the international agenda.
- Empower the OMCT and its SOS-Torture Network to build compelling narratives, hope-based messaging and support the SOS-Torture Network in conducting more effective outreach to a broader public, including through the use of 'validators'.
- Engage policymakers on the relevance of the fight against torture in other key policy areas, including torture and national security, torture and migration, torture and development through the SOS-Torture Network working groups, advocacy as well as targeted campaigns.
- Counter banalisation, relativisation of torture and build advocacy on national security, including through the OMCT Terrorism and Torture Working group.
- Engage donor communities on the support to the anti-torture movement and support to members of the SOS-Torture Network in some of the most challenging situations or countries.

PRIORITY II: PUSHING BACK ON IMPUNITY

Our goal: to mobilise with the SOS-Torture Network to challenge systems of impunity, to better protect and support survivors, and thereby to multiply access to justice and an effective right to reparation, including rehabilitation.

Our lessons learned:

Impunity for torture, extrajudicial executions and disappearances remains pervasive in many - if not most - jurisdictions. This violates the right to remedy and reparation, perpetuates the act of torture, and entrenches trauma for those who have survived torture. For the OMCT, the fight against torture cannot but be anchored in and informed by victims' needs. Importantly, our work shows that the lack of accountability is one of the key missing links for success in torture prevention, compliance and non-repetition. The fight against impunity differs from country to country but poses overriding challenges to human rights advocates, including evidentiary, the 't'esprit de corps' in law enforcement agencies, impunity clauses and often authorities and courts unwilling or incapable to investigate despite the formal existence of remedies and equipped State institutions.

On top of these we face threats to victims, witnesses or defenders who take up the issue of impunity. The treatment of torture and impunity are clear litmus tests for the rule of law, enabling diagnoses of systemic failures in our justice systems. The global environment, including the securitisation of health policies or the growth of populism, is likely to result in policies with higher risks of torture and higher levels of impunity. The context of the confinement confirmed OMCT research that torture and impunity are particularly pervasive vis-à-vis the poor and the marginalised, and often entrenched in broader patterns of exclusion and discrimination. Another point we've learnt is the overall lack of recognition of extra-custodial violence as torture – be it in enforcing confinement or quelling the wave of public protest we have seen across the globe over the past years.

Within this strategic plan, the OMCT will scale up its support and advocacy challenging impunity. The key to OMCT's anti-impunity work is its support to local human rights defenders documenting, reporting, acting and litigating torture cases and who are united in the SOS-Torture Network.

Our way to bring change:

Over the previous strategic plan, the OMCT innovated with the creation of Network-wide litigators group (Africa, Asia, Latin America) to stimulate accountability action. These groups draw from the primary expertise of SOS-Torture Network members and provide a peer support mechanism to empower litigation on torture, including joint litigation to international courts and bodies when local remedies fail. We follow a modern holistic approach with in-built victim support, advocacy and solidarity action surrounding legal cases. Through this collective work, the OMCT will identify best practices, progressive legal strategies and develop policy and guidance to litigators on torture.

Since its inception, the OMCT has provided support through a global victims fund for direct medical, social and legal assistance to victims when there is no other accessible support. We will integrate this tool to support victim recovery while pursuing litigation to seek justice. On the basis of this experience, we will build and deepen our case and advocacy work nationally and regionally. We will target systemic impunity challenges in respective countries but also seek to identify strategic cases, including on instances of non-custodial torture

or the use of force and seek progress at regional and international levels to challenge underlying policing practices and structures. A second and related axis of our impunity work will be the support to civil society in situations of systematic, widespread and often escalating torture and impunity. This is linked to political instability, elections, conflicts or waves of public protest and growing authoritarianism. Our advocacy work will be reactive but target protracted crises when local civil society action is threatened.

Our key actions:

- **Litigation:** empower more anti-torture litigation, victim support & advocacy, through regional and/or Network-based litigators groups to mentor, guide and multiply litigation, including to international bodies.
- **Victim assistance:** a safety net of social, medical and legal assistance through OMCT's emergency fund for victims of torture (Victims Fund), support victim structures, including in Tunisia (SANAD centres) and provide exceptional lifeline support to members working with victims in closing or closed environments.
- **Advocacy:** Denounce, monitor and report on situations of systematic or widespread torture and support local and global advocacy for accountability, giving local voices access to international remedies, advocacy venues and build greater media coverage and attention to those struggles.
- **Network:** Support peer learning, best practice development on advocacy strategies and policy formulation, on issues such as documentation, investigation, victim and reprisal protections, and on non-custodial torture, and mobilise the solidarity of the Network in support to crisis situations.

PRIORITY III: PUSHING FOR REFORMS AND UNIVERSAL SYSTEMS

Our goal: to act jointly with members of the SOS-Torture Network and CSOs to achieve legal and policy reforms for the prevention of torture and greater compliance with anti-torture standards, and to strengthen and preserve the protective reach of multilateral human rights systems.

Our lessons learned:

Over the last decades two major achievements characterise the broader global combat against torture. First, the development of a solid set of standards, regional and universal mechanisms to eradicate torture. Second, the growth of a vibrant movement of local organisations across the globe driving an anti-torture agenda and seeking the realisation of those rights locally. Yet the implementation of these frameworks remains a key challenge. The laws and institutions that have been created frequently provide a formal compliance by States at best, while growing populism, increasing authoritarianism, the surge of concepts of a 'win-win cooperation', and the effect of the pandemic have further weakened multilateral protections.

More often than not, organisations are struggling and are too insulated to mobilise wider support to trigger anti-torture reform agendas. One of the core ideas that drive the OMCT is to support the multiple struggles against torture locally and to give them a voice on the global stage. Since 2013, the OMCT acts as the formal coordinator for CSOs who engage with the Committee Against Torture as the principal universal anti-torture mechanism. Over this period, we have learnt to systematise the mobilisation of civil society organisations, integrating the Convention and its oversight mechanism into sustained advocacy circuits from local to global, building strength, and returning from global to local for greater impact. In many instances this has enabled greater visibility for underreported situations of torture, supporting their documentation and sharing information through the OMCT Network with international mechanisms. The experience shows that multilateral systems are crucially important both to open and to guide reform dynamics, but also when local civic space is closing. It is here that international processes often provide one of the very few entry points into a discussion on anti-torture reforms and one of the rare opportunities to legitimise local civil society demands.

Our way to bring change:

Over the coming years, the OMCT will continue to use the treaty body and council systems to give local actors a voice and to build powerful and sustained advocacy circuits. We will continue to document, report and advocate on the many situations of torture that would otherwise go unnoticed. We will pay particular attention to broaden anti-torture coalitions and approaches that raise the profile and visibility of anti-torture advocacy. Beyond these approaches, we will deepen our work with members in focus countries, including by addressing the health and human rights emergency in detention and in policing that came to the fore during the recent pandemic. Importantly, in this plan we also make the protection of the universal human rights system itself one of our key objectives. We will continue to bring human rights situations to the attention of universal bodies, engage universal mechanisms on a progressive interpretation, work to restore the functioning of the system during the pandemic, and mobilise with others, such as in the UN treaty body network, against any attempts to weaken the universal protection system.

Our core actions:

- Systematic use of the Convention Against Torture and its Committee (CAT) as an advocacy tool to change practices, law and policies to protect from torture locally, to share CAT findings and decisions, foster coalition building and encourage States to implement the Convention.
- Support the SOS-Torture Network and CSOs, including in underreported environments, to document, report, utilise and disseminate information, through joint advocacy (fact-finding missions, legal submissions) to improve laws and policies strengthening compliance with existing standards.
- Undertake a collective initiative to address the human rights and health crisis in detention with members of the SOS-Torture Network and to seize the opportunity to engage in systemic prison and detention reforms.
- Give Network members a voice in other international advocacy fora, such as before the UN Human Rights Council, the European Union or regional mechanisms in particularly difficult environments and support their international advocacy efforts.
- Act to protect the integrity of universal mechanisms, including through coalition building with likeminded organisations in other sectors, advocate with universal mechanisms to develop and maintain progressive policies of protection and provide submissions/briefings.
- Provide the space to CSOs for collective action, learning and experience sharing across countries and regions on effective advocacy strategies and anti-torture campaigns.

PRIORITY IV: PROTECTING THOSE WHO ARE MOST AT RISK (SITUATIONS OF VULNERABILITY)

Our goal: to act with members of the SOS-Torture Network to develop effective protections for those most at risk of torture and/or those who may be in particular situations of vulnerability.

Our lessons learned:

Torture and other cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment are inherently linked to the concept of vulnerability. Torture typically affects those who may be perceived as 'the other' and in particular those in situations of vulnerability, including the underprivileged, the marginalised and discriminated against. Such communities or groups of people may face at times multiple forms of discrimination, abuse and torture, while impunity will entrench marginalisation. They are often the least likely to access formal justice processes, which are often perceived as biased against them.

Children and women also may suffer violence against them differently, including in places of detention and custody, but also in the private sphere. Societies often respond differently to them when they come into conflict with the law. Consequently, they have less access to remedy and reparation. But there are other groups that are also at particular risk, in particular migrants who face threats of torture all along the migration routes from both State and non-State actors and who are increasingly criminalised once they reach supposedly safe regions. Other minorities, such as the Dalit, low caste or indigenous peoples are also likely to suffer more torture and face more challenges to ensure accountability. Finally, the impact of Covid-19 has sharply reminded us that those who are suffering most from the virus, as well as from the securitisation of health, are communities that are marginal, discriminated and dispossessed. This applies to their detention, to police abuse, to the lack of accountability and to the threats to defenders who take up their cause.

Our way to bring change:

The OMCT has a history in bringing the protection of children, women, and those underprivileged more broadly to the attention of the anti-torture structures to mainstream their protection and obtain equal protection. This provides an added value for women and child rights actors who may not be fully cognizant of the protections afforded by the anti-torture framework, given also that anti-torture organisations tend to easily neglect the needs of groups not seen as their priority. A system of laws and prevention policies can lose its value and credibility if it does not deliver to those most at risk. The OMCT has therefore made protection for all a particular emphasis of its work. We will continue our work collectively in our Network to research and advocate for torture protection along migration routes and take up the cause of other communities, including indigenous peoples. We will seek to increase the awareness and understanding of torture and build on the added value that the anti-torture framework can provide – especially on migration routes - to refugee law, which focuses more on status determination. We will also set out how torture and trauma are specific in the context of indigenous populations requiring targeted advocacy strategies. We will develop both specific actions jointly with members of the SOS-Torture Network on particular communities, as well as mainstream the protection of those in vulnerable situations across the different strategic areas of this plan (such as on impunity or compliance).

Our core actions:

- **Protect children** in conflict with the law through civil society monitoring of places of detention, advocacy on policies that increase protection, support SOS-Torture Network members to build work on children and support child rights organisations to integrate an anti-torture dimension into their work.
- **Protect women** including through collective research and advocacy with members of the SOS-Torture Network on violence against women as a form of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and by mainstreaming a **gender dimension** into our anti-torture work with the Committee Against Torture (compliance) and litigation and accountability work (impunity). We will pay particular attention to other situations of vulnerability, such as members of the LGBTIQ community.
- Conduct collective research and joint advocacy, setting protection agendas including through joint Network working groups on the protection of **people on the move (migration)**, on **minorities and indigenous peoples**, laying out specific dimensions of torture and vulnerability and collective trauma, and develop joint advocacy with the SOS-Torture Network to improve their protection.
- Pay particular attention, as a transversal topic in all strategic areas of action, to the protection of the most vulnerable, often those **excluded, marginalised and dispossessed, the poor** and raise systemic discrimination and abuse in police and detention.
- Provide a space for the exchange of experiences, regional and cross-regional sharing of strategies and advocacy approaches to mobilise more organisations to take on the concerns of vulnerable communities.

PRIORITY V: OPENING SPACE AND THE RIGHT TO DEFEND

Our goal: to provide a holistic system of support and protection to defenders under imminent threat, including those criminalised and detained, to support the resilience of organisations to sustain work in closing environments – all of which forms the basis for a right to defend human rights.

Our lessons learned:

Working on torture within a global network and protecting the space to defend rights is inseparable. Yet, the need to protect defenders cannot be limited only to those working on or to those defenders suffering torture. As we witness daily, and have seen again during the pandemic, human rights are inter-connected and indivisible, as is the common space for civil society to protect rights. Each threat to a HRD is a threat to the very right to defend rights. Partly as a backlash to the growth and impact of the human rights movement, we continue to see a deepening of attacks on defenders across the globe, aggressive laws to control, close or suffocate the space to defend rights. A particularly troublesome trend is the increasing criminalisation and detention of defenders across the globe (censorship by detention). The pandemic has further fragilised local CSOs, and for some, threatened their sustainability. Global protection networks are thus needed not only for the protection of individual HRDs, but also to maintain and re-open the space for civil society action, to build resilience, and to increase the legitimacy and success of their actions.

Our way to bring change:

First, we will protect human rights defenders. Through the OMCT's 20-year cooperation in the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (with FIDH) and more recently in the EU HRDs Protection Mechanisms ([ProtectDefenders.eu](https://protectdefenders.eu)), we continue to deliver support, protection and lifelines to HRDs most at risk the world over. Over the next four years, we are committed to deepen and modernise our tested and trusted tools and deepen advocacy on the 'drivers of closing spaces'. **Second**, we will support resilience and protection for civil society actors in closing spaces, enabling them to sustain their work. The OMCT not only works 'for' the protection of human rights defenders but 'with' human rights defenders in its Network. Over the coming years we want to sharpen our contribution, building on the added value of being an anti-torture movement. In particular, we will draw on our Network's expertise to develop and enable access to best practices in psychosocial care for HRDs, and will work to ensure the recognition of repeated, prolonged harassment and threats against HRDs as forms of torture and ill-treatment ('torturous environment'). We will provide lifeline support to threatened partners in closing environments, and we will launch a new initiative to protect and campaign for defenders in arbitrary detention (SOS Defenders), joining our special expertise on torture and detention with our successes and partnerships to mobilize on behalf of HRDs for their release. **Third**, we will seek to embody the above actions in a concerted effort with our partners to reframe the discussion on HRDs, building on their protection and valorisation to strengthen the recognition of the 'right to defend rights' as the basis for all defender work.

Our key areas of action:

- **Protective advocacy:** provide a structural mechanism of protection through a global alert and advocacy system ('the Observatory', including appeals, fact-finding, advocacy, support to HRD protection mechanisms).

- **Security support:** material assistance, including medical, social or legal emergency support or, in the worst case, relocation to safety within ProtectDefenders.eu and contribution, as a lead member, to the success and longer-term sustainability of this collective and comprehensive EU human rights defenders' mechanism.
- **Supporting resilience:** strengthening systems of psychosocial care to defenders under threat, drawing on the expertise in our Network. Further we will allow for strategy exchange and collective action within the SOS-Torture Network. Our advocacy will target drivers of the closing space phenomena such as national security and terrorism, migration and foreign funding.
- **Lifeline support:** provide a lifeline of support, mentoring and accompaniment to defenders in Network organisations, so that they continue their vital work in the most challenging situations.
- **Detained defenders:** a key focus of our work will be to develop a global system of support and protection of human rights defenders in detention (SOS defenders).
- **Secure a right to defend rights:** maintain the space to defend, and actively seek the recognition of the right to defend through advocacy and targeted legal action jointly with members of the SOS-Torture Network.

PART III: INSTITUTIONAL REFORM TARGETS

OUR INSTITUTIONAL TARGETS

Our goal over the coming four years is to consolidate our foundations and complete an agenda of institutional strengthening launched four years ago. Its aim is to better serve the Network's strength, growth, impacts, and sustainability. We have identified the following core institutional targets:

Target I: Network renewal and excellence

Over the coming years, we will invest in empowering the SOS-Torture Network, including through evolving governance, coordination, and communication. We will bring in new actors, including from challenging or underrepresented geographical areas, and encourage a generational renewal both in our Network and our governance structures. We will invest in mobilising the Network to act together in solidarity, to learn from each other, and to develop as a knowledge hub and centre of excellence for the anti-torture movement.

Target II: Financial and operational sustainability

Over the coming four years, the OMCT will seek to consolidate its financial and operational viability and that of its Network. It will seek to finalise an overhaul of its policy framework while maintaining its trademark reactivity, and invest into its capacity to fundraise, including towards private and individual donors and giving. It will work to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation systems, exploring ways to measure the collective impact of a network on torture. We will also encourage a broader discussion on the support to local human rights organisations working on torture, within or outside of the SOS-Torture Network.

Target III: Deepen regional dynamics and collective action

Over the coming years, we will build on successful experiences in strengthening the connections among our Network within regional settings, building areas of collective work and exchange, and deepening our advocacy support to local partners. We will strengthen the strategic positioning of our OMCT Europe offices located in Brussels (an affiliate to the OMCT) to host a Europe-wide program, and our offices in Tunis to host a broader programme on the MENA region. While encouraging more regional exchange and greater cohesion within a region, we will maintain a key added value of the OMCT, the ability to foster cross-regional exchange, learning and the ability to act and campaign as a global Network powering the movement.

COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS AND COOPERATION

The DNA of the OMCT is built on international cooperation and partnership. We work primarily with and through members of our global Network to build regional and cross-regional collaborative actions. We always encourage broader coalition-building beyond strictly anti-torture organisations, drawing other actors into our movement. Through this plan, we will deepen our partnership with the 11-organisation coalition [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu/), our broad human rights defenders mechanism. We will deepen partnerships such as our role in a treaty body network to protect multilateral systems, and we will strive to increase engagement with regional organisations to use the anti-torture framework and broaden the movement toward the absolute prohibition of torture around the world.

COMMITMENT TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The OMCT is ODA-eligible and our Network's work is indispensable for the achievement of the SDGs. Although our work is most relevant to SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), our importance to the SDG agenda goes well beyond this and follows the logic of 'achieving a better and more sustainable future for all'. This strategic plan addresses torture and human rights violations in the context of inequalities, entrenched discrimination, and it addresses the protection of women and children. Importantly, we take the position that there is simply no sustainable development without a rights-based approach, human rights defenders and a sustainable human rights movement that can address violations, inequalities and act on the goals and indicators set out in the SDGs.

Approved by the General Assembly in Geneva,
26 March 2021.

